

## An Empty Cradle

Tension filled the dark room. Lord Voldemort waited for Wormtail to stop jabbering. His excuses were beginning to gnaw on the Dark Lord's nerves. Lazily, he raised his wand and pointed it at his servant. Screams filled the air, as Voldemort placed the Cruciatus Curse on him.

"I grow tired of your excuses, Wormtail!"

"You are far too merciful-." Wormtail shrieked, as he rolled on the floor in pain.

"Remember that," Voldemort said, as he lifted the curse. "Wormtail, I have waited quite patiently these past months for such an opportunity as this. Do you know what I want?"

"The Potters dead?" Wormtail cringed expecting more pain.

"Yes, Wormtail, I would like that very much. Now that you have been made their Secret Keeper for the blood traitor and his mudblood wife, it is within my grasp."

Wormtail dumbly nodded his head.

"But, Wormtail, you have yet to tell me their location. I have been merciful to you... for now, but my patience is wearing thin. Voldemort toyed with his wand before resting it once again on the quivering form before him.

"My Lord, please, they are my friends."

Voldemort laughed. "What is your price, besides your life?"

Wormtail suddenly became still. "My Lord, have I not served you well?"

"Yes, Wormtail, you have had your uses, but like all rats, you will lose your worth." Voldemort let his words sink into Wormtail's head. "Tell me their location and you shall live. It is a chance many would kill to have, and I am offering it to you."

"They are at Godric's Hollow."

Voldemort smiled coldly. "Of course," he murmured mostly to himself.

"My Lord, will you kill Lily and James?"

*"The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches... Born to parents who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies..."* And that is as far as Snape was able to hear. The Potter boy is a threat to me?"

"But must Lily and James die for him?"

Voldemort's snake-like eyes fell on Wormtail. "You have no loyalty. You betrayed them. They would kill you, because of the information you have just given me. Do not fear, Wormtail, for you have something better than their protection. You have mine."

Wormtail crawled to his master's feet and grabbed the hem of his robes. "You are far too good to me."

Voldemort smirked once more. "What would happen, Wormtail, if one of the two promised children were to disappear?" When Wormtail shook his head, Voldemort continued. "I would be invincible. This is where you come into play, Wormtail."

"Mast-."

"Silence!" Wormtail became immediately quiet. "I will spare your 'friends', all I ask is for you to bring the boy to me."

"You wish me to kidnap Harry, my Lord?"

"Harry," Voldemort whispered. "Harry is the key. I need him alive for the time being. I will have Lucius take him to the Department of Mysteries and take the prophecy. After that, I will decide if young Harry lives or dies. Wormtail, you will grab Harry and take him to Lucius. He will take care of the rest."

"Why me, my Lord?"

“The boy will hardly be afraid of ‘Uncle’ Wormtail, will he? If you are discovered, Wormtail, remember that your friends will die along with Harry. I can always pay a visit to the Longbottoms to get the prophecy. Now, Wormtail, it is time for you to be off.”

Not needing to be told twice, Wormtail apparated away from the Dark Lord’s fortress.

Night had fallen hours ago, yet Lily and James Potter were still awake. Peter Pettigrew was beginning to have doubts about his mission. Were James and Lily ever going to go to bed? In the window of the small house, Pettigrew watched as James came up behind Lily wrapping his arms around her. She smiled and then playfully slapped his face causing James to smile ruefully. Peter silently wondered what James had done. Lily reached for the light, and Peter’s heart jumped into his throat. They were finally going to bed! The house darkened. The only light to be seen was emitting from Lily and James’s room, but that too disappeared after a time.

Turning into his rat form, Pettigrew traveled across the lawn to the small shed, in which a ladder was kept. Transforming back into his human form, Peter carried the ladder to Harry’s window. Setting it gently up against the house, Peter then returned to being a rat. He scurried through the grass, until he reached a crack in the foundation. Pushing himself through, he continued on his mission. First, he went to check on James and Lily. Both appeared to be sound asleep, but Peter knew better. James had told him and Sirius on one occasion that he had not been sleeping well as of late. This mission’s success would depend on Harry. Pettigrew knew this.

Peter transformed to be able to open the door to Harry’s nursery. Inside, Harry was sleeping contently. Before picking Harry up, Pettigrew opened the window. Now that the window was opened, he lifted Harry into his arms and began to go through the window, when he heard footsteps. Harry stirred slightly in his arms. To Peter’s relief, the footsteps went past the door to the nursery and continued down the stairs. Slowly and quietly, Peter descended down the ladder. His legs shaking fiercely, nevertheless his feet never slipped. Guilt filtered through the walls that he had built around his mind.

"I am doing what is best for James," he whispered, as he looked into Harry's face. "James would have died, if the Dark Lord had decided to kill you straight out. It is better this way."

Wormtail's feet landed on the ground, and he began to run with all his might into the woods that surrounded the Potters' house. The running jostled Harry from his sleep, but he did not cry out when he saw that his Uncle Wormtail was holding him. Instead, he snuggled deeper into the warm arms.

Wormtail smiled. "That's a good boy, Harry. You just go right back to sleep."

In the woods, Peter stopped. With a pop, Lucius Malfoy appeared before him. "Well done, Pettigrew, you didn't bumble this one. Now hand over the boy. I need to get him to the Ministry before the Potters realize that he is missing."

Reluctantly, Peter handed over the sleeping bundle. Malfoy immediately apparated. With one more glance toward the Potters' home, Pettigrew apparated back to his master to wait for Harry's fate to be decided.

James walked down the stairs of his home and turned into the kitchen to get a glass of water. He gazed out into the night, as he drank from the glass cup. His eyes squinted, as he thought he saw movement toward the woods. Putting down the glass, he peered more closely out the window. The uneasy feeling he had felt this Halloween's day rose in him once again. He moved to the magic detectors that Dumbledore had lent them. Nothing showed on them. Frowning, James returned to the kitchen and poured out the remnants of water that remained in the glass, before making his way back to the second floor.

He stopped at Harry's door and slowly opened it, not wanting to disturb the sleeping infant. He smiled, as he thought of Harry. However, his smile disappeared when he saw the opened window. The door was swung open with force, as he ran into the dark room. His heart stopped when he saw the empty cradle. Gazing through the window, James noted the ladder and disturbed patches of grass around it.

Running back to the room that he shared with Lily, he grabbed his wand that lay on his nightstand. Turning, he went to Lily's side and shook her from her sleep. "Lily, Harry's gone! They've kidnapped him!"

Lily's eyes opened wide. Her mouth opened then closed as if she was trying to say something but was too shocked to.

"I need you to contact Dumbledore. They went into the woods, I'm certain of it. I need you to tell Dumbledore, I will be back after I examine the woods."

"Be careful, James." Lily pleaded, as she grabbed her own wand.

The two parted in the downstairs living room. With Lily contacting Dumbledore through Floo Powder, James felt safe to proceed with his search of the woods. He followed the kidnapper's trail. But once in the woods, it disappeared, leaving James certain that they had apparated. Fury welled up inside him, and he angrily kicked the ground before returning to the house.

Once inside, he felt relief when he saw that Dumbledore had already arrived and was now seated in one of the living room chairs. He had probably used the Floo Network to reach the Potters' house. Lily was sitting across from the esteemed professor on the sofa. James shook his head, when he saw Lily's inquisitive look.

"Whoever it was apparated before I could reach them." He said, as he slumped down onto the sofa right beside Lily. He wrapped his right arm around her quivering shoulder.

Dumbledore nodded at James's conclusion. "Not too long ago, I received a message from the Ministry of Magic that Harry Potter and Lucius Malfoy entered into the Department of Mysteries and took from the Hall of Prophecies a prophecy pertaining to Lord Voldemort, Harry Potter, and Neville Longbottom. They, of course, were gone by the time Aurors went to apprehend them."

Both Lily and James's faces paled immediately at the mention of the prophecy.

"So he knows," Lily whispered.

Dumbledore nodded solemnly. "Our only hope is now Neville."

"What about Harry," James asked stubbornly.

"I am afraid, once Voldemort hears the full context of the prophecy that Harry will no longer be needed or wanted alive by Voldemort."

"He won't kill my baby," Lily moaned out of anger and despair of being unable to do anything to aid her son.

The professor took in the young frustrated parents. "I will not lie to you." He folded his hands solemnly. "The odds of us finding Harry alive are not good, but the Order will do everything humanly possible to find him."

"I want to help." James eyes lit with a fierce fire.

"So do I," Lily whispered.

"Lil, this is not-."

"James, you are not going to stop me from helping find our child!"

Dumbledore broke in, before the argument went further. "It would be best if both of you leave this for the Order."

"We are members of the Order!"

Sighing, Dumbledore calmly explained. "James, you and Lily are too emotionally involved with the situation. You would follow your hearts instead of your heads, which would not only put yourselves in danger but Harry as well. You know many of us at the Order care deeply about Harry. You must trust us."

Lily placed her arms around her husband and slowly nodded her head. "You will tell us immediately if you find anything... anything at all."

"Yes, no matter how little, you will hear it from me." Dumbledore paused. "I have already had members of the Order attain Sirius for questioning."

"Why Sirius?" James blurted out. "He would never have kidnapped Harry!"

"He was your Secret Keeper."

"No," James suddenly stopped, and the flames in his eyes grew larger. Peter was our Secret Keeper. HE'S BEEN WORKING FOR VOLDEMORT THE WHOLE TIME!" James stood suddenly and began to pace. "I will find that rat and kill him!"

Lily seemed speechless at her husband's outburst and at the truth of who betrayed them. She began to rub her tear-stained eyes, as if to turn back time.

"We will take care of Peter, James. I will release Sirius immediately." Dumbledore rose from his chair. "Before I leave you, both of you must promise not to leave this house until I approve it." When neither parent replied, Dumbledore narrowed his eyes, until finally he got two nods of agreement.

"We will do everything possible." With that Dumbledore grabbed a hand-full of Floo Powder and disappeared into the fireplace. His last words being, 'Ministry of Magic'.

With the professor's departure, James returned to Lily and took her in his arms, and together they grieved.

The search for Harry James Potter was nearing its third week. The investigators were no closer to finding the lost infant. James Potter walked through the halls of the Aurors' office with one of his best friends, Sirius Black. Only recently had he been allowed to return to work by Dumbledore, though James knew that he was under close supervision. He was, however glad to be doing something instead of waiting. Lily too had been allowed to continue helping the Order with brewing her potions.

"Black, Potter, you're wanted in Moody's office." A voice called.

The two exchanged looks. The door to Moody's office was just down the way. An ominous feeling entered James's heart, and he abruptly felt cold.

"You alright, Mate?"

"Of course." Came James's short reply.

Sirius reached for the door handle and turned it. The office was filled with many interesting magical trinkets. Many of the trinkets were used to detect spells, dark wizards, and a wide variety of magical items. Moody, himself, stood behind his desk, looking as sinister as ever. His magical eye traveled between Sirius and James, as he waited for them to seat themselves. Three seats were placed in front of the desk, the third being occupied by Albus Dumbledore.

"Did you find something," James asked expectantly.

Albus's head bowed causing his long beard to cascade down his robes. "A Dark Mark was placed over a country house. The order went to investigate. Inside the house was torn apart."

"Powerful magic," Moody added.

"What does this have to do with Harry?" Sirius said becoming impatient.

"We found the body of a child Harry's age."

"Harry?" James nearly choked out the name, as conflicted emotions welled up in his throat.

Dumbledore nodded his head. "There is no doubt."

James stood suddenly, and before anyone could stop him, he was gone.

"Give him some time alone," Sirius calmly stated. Even though he sounded calm, he was seriously concerned about his friend.



Dumbledore nodded. "Let's hope that Peter Pettigrew does not cross James's path, before we have the chance to question him."

Sirius's eyes fell on the door that James had just departed through, and anger welled up inside him. "He better not cross my path as well!"

"It is all over the Daily Prophet, my Dark Lord, that Harry Potter is dead." Bellatrix Lestrange spoke, as she knelt before the Lord Voldemort. "But what do we do with the real Potter."

Voldemort leaned deeply into his throne chair. Silently, he tapped his fingers against each other. He had listened to the prophecy on numerous occasions these past three weeks, but had yet to come to a conclusion. The only two things he had decided on was that he should end the search for young Harry, and to obliterate Wormtail's memories that concerned the Potter Child. Both of these had now been successfully carried out. Impatiently, he rose and moved to leave the throne room.

"Follow me," he called to his loyal Death Eater. "It is I who gets to choose who will destroy me. Irony really. It is also ironic that, if I had proceeded with my original plan, I might not have been here today. But that is not important, for ultimately I have defeated Dumbledore by stealing the boy."

Bellatrix remained silent. She knew better than to interrupt the Dark Lord during such times as these.

"I have removed one of the possibilities away from Dumbledore's watchful eyes. What if I were to choose him as my poison."

"Choose him and kill him... it makes sense, my Lord."

"I mean to take it one step further." Voldemort laughed harshly. By this time, the two had reached the door, which shut off Harry Potter's new 'nursery' from the world. Slowly, the Dark Lord opened the door and entered. This would be his second visit with the small lad.

"What do you have in mind, my Lord?"

Awkwardly, Voldemort picked up the watchful infant. With one chilled finger, he traced the child's cheek. An unfeeling smile cracked his lips. The Dark Lord's whisper was barely audible, but Lestrangle unmistakably heard it.

"I intend to love him."

## A War Torn World

A solitary figure stood in the diminutive gray cottage outside of Coventry. His head bowed, as he peered down at the corpse that lay before his feet. His eyes were as dead as his victim, betraying no thought or emotion. With a flip of his wrist, his wand was no longer pointed at the deceased man, but rather secured in his robes. Carefully, he examined the scene meticulously checking that no evidence was left. Satisfied, he moved to the open window, through which he had entered the dwelling of the blood traitor. The Ministry and Order of the Phoenix had been active and more coordinated recently. The last time he had ventured forth he had nearly met up with the head of the Aurors, Mad Eye Moody.

His young body effortlessly hefted itself through the window. Landing on his feet, he immediately set off for the designated checkpoint, where he would apparate. If this had been a different era, he would not have been allowed to apparate, since he was both underage and unlicensed. A grim smile flitted on to his face and just as quickly disappeared. If the Ministry was in as much control as they had once been, he would not even be allowed to use magic out of school, let alone use the unforgivable curses. His thoughts cleared. When he was playing this part, he could not think or feel. The success of his mission was his only concern.

As he grew nearer to his destination his lungs began to burn as the cool night air filled them. He spun on his heels, pulling out his wand. He gazed into the darkness and was pleased to see that he had not been followed. After giving a silent command, he instantly felt the sickening feeling of being apparated. Immediately, he found himself far from Coventry.

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James Potter, along with his fellow Auror and partner, Sirius Black, surveyed the most recent crime scene left by Voldemort's assassin. The assassinations from this talented assassin were rare. Dumbledore believed that this particular killer was reserved solely for those who had personally defied Voldemort or had betrayed him. Of course, Voldemort reserved the most important 'traitors' for himself, or so Dumbledore had told members of the Order.

The victim lay on his back with his eyes staring blindly up at the ceiling. "The Avada Kedavra got him."

Sirius nodded grimly, and then nudged his head toward the window. "My bet is he entered and exited through that window."

"Whatever gave you that idea?" James asked sarcastically. "Perhaps, the opened window, mate? And then, of course, they apparated."

"Someone always has to state the obvious. Usually it was..." Sirius voice trailed off, when he caught himself almost saying the name. "Sorry, James, I just got a bit nostalgic."

James brushed off the near mention of Peter Pettigrew. "Ancient history... there is nothing I can do for him now. I can't even find his killer to get revenge."

Sirius kept his eyes averted. His friend could not even say Harry's name. The pain was still that fresh. Peter Pettigrew would pay for the anguish he put the Potter family through; Sirius would make sure of it. "Well, I believe we are finished here, Prongs. Nothing more we can do for him, but inform the Ministry to send some on over."

Looking at the clock on the wall briefly James smiled. "This will be a first."

"First for what?"

"We are actually going to be on time for an Order meeting."

"Lily might have a heart attack!" Sirius gave a lopsided grin. "I would not want to miss this meeting for the world."

"Don't hold your breath, Padfoot. The odds that our informant will know something useful are slim. From what Dumbledore has specified, he was not very high on Ol' Voldie's ladder."

"The odds are better then not. I say he knows something halfway decent."

James smiled. "Then we have a wager?"

“But of course, Prongs, old boy.”

The two, then, apparated, landing in a deserted street. In front of them stood an ancient house that no muggle and most wizards could not see. Only members of the Order of the Phoenix knew its location. The house was called Grimmauld's Place and had only recently come into Sirius's possession with the passing of his mother. Having no love for the place of his childhood, he had readily handed it over to Dumbledore to be used as the Order's official headquarters.

“If my parents could only see what I have done to the place.” Sirius chuckled to himself.

James shook his head, as he reached to turn the antique doorknob. He was careful to remain quiet trying to avoid awaken the permanently stuck portrait of Sirius's late mother. He did not need or want her shrieks in his ears. Once in the hallway, they saw that it was packed with members just getting ready to file in the dining room. He spotted at the top of the stairs the four Weasley children. Hermione Granger and Neville Longbottom, both were friends of Ron's, both were also in Ron's year at Hogwarts, were standing with them. Slightly behind them, he caught sight of a chestnut haired boy. His second son smiled when he caught sight of his father and ‘Uncle Padfoot’. Dorian Potter was just two years younger than what his brother would have been. He looked more like Lily, despite his darker hair and his hazel eyes, which he had received from James. James waved at the children, who were all eager to eavesdrop on the Order's meetings, though most of their plans to do so had failed. James smiled. It took a lot to get mischief past him and Sirius, because they had done a lot in their time, though occasionally they would still pull pranks of their own.

With Sirius at his side, James entered the now packed dining room just as Mrs. Weasley began to corral the children upstairs. At the start of Voldemort's terror, the wizarding world had been unprepared. Dumbledore had quickly assembled the Order, but had seemed too late, as members began to be picked off one by one. After Harry had been kidnapped and then killed, Voldemort had remained almost silent, and the Order had been able to regroup. Many more volunteers had joined making it harder for Voldemort to finish off the

Order. However the Dark Lord seemed unconcerned with their growth and possession of the prophesied one. James sighed. Harry had been killed because he might be that boy. Then both Neville's parents were killed, because he was the one.

Lily, spotting her husband, rose and hugged him tightly. "About time you two show up on time!"

"No hug for me, Lils?" Sirius asked, pulling his face into a pouting expression.

"No, but I do have this." Suddenly, she nudged Sirius in the ribs.

"What was that for?"

"There was a hex on my chair."

With a hurt expression, Sirius stated. "Actually that was Fred and George."

"And who taught them?"

"Prongs." Sirius said seriously.

"James!" Lily's fiery green eyes fell on her husband.

"I might have... hard to remember now."

The three's playful banter came to an end, when Dumbledore and another man entered through the door and quickly walked to the head of the room.

"Over here," Lily began to lead the two by their arms. "Remus is holding our seats."

The two took their seats that were located near the front of the room. James and Sirius nodded to Remus as they sat down. They would have spoken but Dumbledore had already begun.

"Firstly, I would like to introduce Mr. Roland Pierce, who comes to us under grave circumstances. I will let him speak of what he knows concerning the movement of Voldemort." Many in the room cringed at

the mention of the name. With the introduction out of the way, Dumbledore took a seat in the front row.

Pierce shook horribly as he gazed over the crowd. "I am not in on His deeper secrets. But I have recently discovered through a friend, who shall remain R.A.B. that the Dark Lord has created Horcruxes, which are hidden in numerous locations. My friend only knows the location of one of these Horcruxes, and he set out a long time to find it, and told me he hid in this very house. It was Slytherin's locket."

Dumbledore spoke. "Molly, you know this house well, would you please find this locket." The newly arrived Molly Weasley nodded her head and left again. "Please, continue, Roland."

"Recently, the Dark Lord has increased his movements. He will be attacking more often and with more force."

Sirius, who knew for sure who R.A.B. was, spoke up. "What happened to R.A.B.?"

Pierce paled when he saw Sirius's face, as it was extremely similar to his brother, Regulus Black. "He was killed personally by Voldemort, not his assassin."

Sirius blinked, and then slowly nodded before departing the room rather rapidly. James immediately understood, but knew Sirius wanted to be left alone.

"Voldemort is using an assassin. Do you know who he is?"

Pierce paused flinching. "The assassin is his son. I have never met him in person. The only ones, who have seen him, are a select few in the Inner Circle. Bellatrix Lestrange is especially close to the boy... a fact she flaunts at every step. Lucius Malfoy is close, because his son, Draco, is the Dark Lord's son's playmate. The reason for the quiet all these years was that the Dark Lord was training his son... and his son will be coming after me for my betrayal."

Silence filled the room, as this news hit all those who were listening. They all came back to one thing. The Dark Lord, Voldemort, had a son.

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Voldemort sat on his throne chair patiently waiting the return of his son. Not far away an anxious Bellatrix Lestrange paced.

Voldemort smiled. "Bella, I do swear you have become quite attached to the boy."

Lestrange paled.

"It is alright, my faithful servant. I have also grown attached to him. I almost love him... at least I think it is love. However, if he were to turn he would have to be cast aside permanently."

"He will not turn. We are all he knows."

At that moment, the door the throne opened wide. In stepped a young man with bright green eyes. His face was covered with a hood, which he promptly removed in sight of his father. His unruly black hair was even more so after the quick removal of the hood. He nodded to his father and smiled quickly at Bellatrix. Voldemort also gave a slight nod of his head in return. Voldemort smiled at the nodded. His son was the only one, who he would not allow to bow before him. He was treated as the Dark Lord's equal.

"How did your mission go, Harry, my son?" Voldemort asked in his snake-like voice.

"The mudblood is dead, father." Harry said smiling as he moved closer to his father.

Voldemort returned the young man's smile. He rose and embraced the sixteen year old in his arms. "I am proud of you, my son." Voldemort smiled when he saw the way Harry beamed at his praise. His son was very much so a child, despite what he was asked to do, and Voldemort tried to keep it this way by sheltering the boy. "Come sit by me for a time, Harry." When Harry did as he was told, Voldemort continued. "I have a very special gift for you."

"What is it?"



The Dark Lord reached into his pocket pulling out a necklace that held a small shield bearing a red lion. "This, Harry, belonged to one of the great founders of Hogwarts, Godric Gryffindor, to be precise. Beside that fact it is a Horcruxes." Seeing the confused light in his son's eyes, Voldemort explained further. "It contains a piece of my very soul, making me immortal. I have seven Horcruxes. It would honor me if you would carry this one, Harry."

Harry grasped the necklace and ran the silver chain between his fingers. "What if I damage it?"

"It is protected by powerful magic. As long as you wear it, it will not be harmed. Only you and I can remove it once you wear it, no matter what your condition the necklace can be removed by no other." Voldemort smiled. "It is fitting that you wear Gryffindor's necklace."

"Because of my traitorous parents?" Harry's face contorted at the thought of his biological family.

"No, because you probably would have been placed in that house... though perhaps not." Voldemort examined Harry Marvolo. "No, I do believe you would be in Slytherin."

This greatly put Harry at ease, and Voldemort was content. "I have a task for you, my son. I am sorry it needs to be done so soon, after all you have just returned."

"Who is the target, father." Harry's eyes hardening as he prepared for the task by separating himself.

Voldemort was surprised at the pride that rose up within him. "Roland Pierce, a Death Eater, has betrayed me. He was in league with Regulus Black. He has spoken with Dumbledore and the Order of the Phoenix. You must destroy him."

Harry removed his wand, his eyes now dead. "He will be dead soon enough, father. I promise you that."

## To Walk the Lonely Path

The room Harry entered was sparsely decorated. Despite its meagerness, this room was still his home. He had lived in there for quite some time. He moved to his closet and pulled open the door absentmindedly. Inside hung many varieties of robes in different colors, but colors would only bring attention to him. He pulled out a black set, which he commonly used on these missions for his father. He was thankful that he had been given at least a day's time to rest before going on to his next mission. Now, however, it was time to begin business.

He began to slowly pull off his regular green robes, when the door opened without warning. Pulling the garments back into their previous position, he turned to see who dared to disturb him. A smile spread across his face.

"I could have killed you," he whispered playfully.

Bellatrix Lestrange shrugged her shoulders nonchalantly. "I know you too well... such as, you are not in that mode when in your father's house."

"Why have you come?"

He was always right to the point, Bellatrix decided. "Your father will see you before you leave."

Harry moved to his dresser as she spoke. Pulling one door open, he removed many small daggers which would hide in his robes. "I usually visit him before I go. What do you want, Bella?"

"This mission reeks of the Order. It could very well end up a trap. Dumbledore is cunning in that way."

Harry shrugged his shoulders. "Then I will bleed the Order to get to Pierce. As for Dumbledore's style, I know it well."

"Promise me you will be careful."

Quiet laughter erupted from Harry's throat. "The mother hen protecting her chick... I believe that is what father calls it. Either that or, a woman afraid to lose her position that she has enjoyed since I was brought in."

"Perhaps," Lestrangle began. "Either way, I do not wish you to be harmed."

Harry began to line the interior of his robes with daggers. "I promise I will be careful. Once Pierce is out of the way, I will leave immediately. I'm not like Crabbe and Goyle. I know when I'm beat."

Lestrangle nodded her head. "In and out."

"In and out," Harry whispered after her. "Tell father I will be there shortly."

Bellatrix nodded and left the room, leaving Harry finally alone to dress.

His dirty robes fell to the ground, and he quickly replaced them with the clean ones. He was especially careful when he put on the clean, as there were daggers hidden within them. Grabbing his wand from the dresser, he moved to leave his haven. Turning, he eyed the bed, which would be so welcoming when he returned. Without second thoughts, he went to his father.

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Dumbledore shuffled through the papers that covered his desk. Across from him sat Professor Snape and Pierce. The two men eyed each other with uncertainty. Dumbledore noticed this and stopped his rustling.

"We are all friends here."

"Forgive me, Dumbledore," Pierce said. "It will take some time to recognize Snape as anything other than a Death Eater."

Snape's face retained any emotion. "The same could be said for you, Pierce."

Dumbledore sighed. "You will shake hands, and then move on."

The two former Death Eaters seemed loathed to move, but finally the men did as Dumbledore requested. The handshake, though it was short, seemed to appease the Headmaster. Dumbledore returned to straightening his papers. His eyes, however, were not on his work but on the two men in front of him.

“We need to stop Voldemort’s assassin. He is a dangerous weapon that we can not allow him to keep.”

Snape spoke first. “I will tell the Dark Lord of our friend here.” Snape motioned to the other man. “It is certain he will send his son to deal with the matter.”

Dumbledore leaned back into his chair. His eyes looking directly toward Snape, he asked, “Have you ever seen the assassin, Severus?”

“No,” came Snape’s even response. “I have heard a few talk of him. As Pierce has said, only the most trusted are allowed to come into contact with the boy.”

“Why have you not told me of his existence before now?”

Snape shrugged. “I have not personally seen the boy, and the talk of him did not start until a year or two. I wanted more tangible proof of his existence.”

“The deaths were not enough proof?” Pierce almost spat the words.

“Deaths can be caused by various means.” Snape eyes shined with cold fire.

Dumbledore raised his hand signaling for quiet. “Severus, I must ask you to return to Voldemort. You will tell him were the Order plans to keep Pierce. The Order will lay a trap for the assassin or any Death Eater Voldemort might send.”

“The Dark Lord will be expecting such a trap.” Snape looked squarely at Dumbledore. “If I send his ‘son’ into a trap, he will no that I am no longer trusted.”

"Tom detests traitors," Dumbledore stated as he rose from his seat and began to pace. "You will tell him that you believe that it is a trap. He will still send forces, because he will want revenge for being turned on."

Pierce nodded his head. "I will do whatever. Removing the queen from this chess game will cripple the Dark Lord."

"Minerva will see you to your temporary 'home'. Members of the Order will be guarding the premises. If all goes as planned, we will be closer to ending this war. I am already certain of which items contain the Dark Lord's Horcruxes. I will be teaching Neville them over the semester."

"Longbottom?" Pierce asked.

"Perhaps, you have stated too much, Headmaster." Snape said, as he glared at Pierce.

Pierce shook his head. "It is fine, Headmaster. I shall go see McGonagall, then."

Pierce left hurriedly to find the Transfiguration professor. Snape had risen to follow him, but stopped when Dumbledore motioned him to return to his seat.

"Pierce, like you, is risking a large price to help the Order. If this ruse fails we might find it pressing to protect him from Voldemort's fury. Severus, if you would be so kind to get this plan on its way."

Snape rose and immediately left the Headmaster's office.

---

Voldemort stabbed the meat that lay before him, cutting it into smaller pieces. Next to him, his son had barely touched the food before him. Voldemort knew this to be the norm with his son and did not comment. It had been a long time since the two of them had had a private dinner with each other. Frustrated by the ominous feeling that seemed to rise from his heart the Dark Lord lay his fork down with a clink. Harry's eyes fell on his father.

“Are you alright?”

The Dark Lord rested against the back of his chair, examining the young man. “The war between us and the blood traitors will pick up to the intensity it was before. I am certain that it will, especially after tonight.” Voldemort picked up his wine glass and twirled it, causing its contents to flow along the rounded glass. “Do you fear death, Harry?”

The young man’s brow furrowed. “No,” his answer finally came.

“If you were to be captured... it pains me to ask this of you, but I can not risk Dumbledore controlling you. Do you understand what I am asking you, Harry?”

“I would gladly die for you, father, just as I have killed for you.”

Voldemort’s mouth opened to say more, but the door to the dining room opened. His son quickly jerked his head to the side, preventing the arrogant fool from seeing his face.

“*CRUCIO!*” The Dark Lord shouted. A yelp was his answer. “Snape, I would have thought you would understand not to disturb me!”

“My Lord,” Snape shouted over the pain. “I have word... of Pierce!”

The curse was instantly removed, and Snape breathed more easily.

“Proceed,” Voldemort stated coldly.

“The Order has set a trap. They have placed him at an abandoned warehouse on the other side of London. There many members of the Order of the Phoenix are waiting for you to move.”

Voldemort nodded, this was information he already knew, besides the location. He looked to his son, who had already placed his hood on his head.

“I will proceed with caution.”

The Dark Lord smiled icily when he saw the spark in his son's eyes. He almost pitied the Order. "Severus, you will remain with me for the time being. My son has business to attend to."

---

The warehouse remained quiet. James envied the calm collection of the man, who lounged in the open, sipping his wine idly. The only evidence that Pierce was uneasy was a slight twitch in his right eye. James looked around the empty warehouse to the various locations where Order members hid. To his left, stood Charlie Weasley and next to him was his brother Bill Weasley. Then to his right, Tonks and Remus waited. His eyes wandered to the other side of the room, until they stopped in the general area where Sirius hid.

A slight noise caused James to look away from where Sirius waited. Calmly, a hooded man of average height walked casually up to Pierce. James's mouth almost dropped when Pierce motioned the young man to sit in the chair next to him. James silently hoped the informant knew what he was doing.

"I knew you would come," came Pierce's simple greeting.

The young man still standing, eyed his target with his composed green eyes. "You should never have betrayed our Lord."

Pierce offered the bottle of wine he had been drinking to the green eyed boy. He was not surprised when the later declined. Sighing, he continued. "Kid, there comes a time when you will learn that everything has a price. What the Dark Lord wants comes with a hefty cost. You do his dirty work... you kill those he orders to be killed." Pierce paused. "Have you ever questioned why some of them were killed?"

Nothing, but silence filled the room. "It is not mine to question." The young man's wand rose, until it leveled on Pierce. "Though I have enjoyed our little 'chat', I would rather be getting on with things."

"The Longbottoms."

The green-eyes lit with rage.

“Why did they die?”

“Necessity.” The young man’s grip on his wand tightened, turning his knuckles bone white.

“Touched a nerve?”

“SHUT-UP!” He shouted through clenched teeth. “*Avada Kedavra!*”

Pierce rolled out of his chair barely missing the deadly green light. The chair where he had been seated disintegrated, as the screaming death hit it. The Order members immediately went into action. The assassin, however, was not surprised when ten left their hiding positions. A shining dagger suddenly appeared in his hand and then left, striking a fast approaching Sturgis Podmore in the throat.

“*Avada Kedavra,*” Harry shouted a second time, this time hitting true. Pierce fell crippled to the ground, dead before he even touched it. His eyes stared blankly at his killer. Harry wildly gazed at the remaining Order members, who were desperately trying to encircle him, trying to decide on the best course of action to escape.

His hand grasped another dagger from his dark robes. He hurled it, grazing the face of a red haired man. The man panicked, giving Harry his exit. Calmly dodging the many curses that were being thrown in his direction, Harry brushed past the red haired man, moving into the shadows. Lightly, he ran in the direction of the only exit. He threw either a curse or a dagger with close precision at those, who either got in his way or threw a curse too close to him.

Using a Confundus Charm on the remaining members, Harry ran through the waiting door. Just through the door, he was surprised to see he had missed one of the Order with his charm. The man, who opposed him now, looked like the reflection he saw in a mirror, except for the hazel eyes.

“*Sectumsempra!*” James Potter shouted and the spell grazed Harry’s cheek, causing blood to seep from an open wound.

“Back off, Potter.” His voice echoed eerily above the calls of the confused in the other room.



James's wand remained aimed on the younger man. "You're not going anywhere, except Azkaban."

"No, I will be returning to my father's side." Harry's lips began to form the killing curse.

"*Silencio!*" A deceptive smile formed on James Potter's face. "We can't be having that."

The rage on the young man's face abated and was replaced with a smile that reflected James's own. With lightening quick reflexes, Harry grabbed his last remaining dagger and threw it at the man, blocking his path. The dagger hit him in the chest.

James Potter stumbled backwards in surprise. He first eyed the dagger, before turning back to the thrower. His hazel eyes meet the green. It was then he thought to himself, as the world grew dark around him, and only the green eyes remained, that they looked familiar.

Harry watched as the man landed on the ground before him. His mind was moving frantically. In the background, he heard the voice of his enemies slowly regaining their minds. Heedlessly, Harry walked over the limp body. His legs carried him off into the night.

## Dark Haze

James Potter stirred slightly. He felt something tight around his chest and his memory began to replay the last moments before the haze had fallen over his eyes. He saw the assassin standing before him and then nothing. James slowly opened his eyes only to have them assaulted by glaring light.

“James?” He heard Lily’s wavering voice.

With effort, he focused on the pale face of his wife. “Where am I?”

Her fingers brushed aside a stray strand of his hair. “St. Mungo’s, dear.”

“What happened?”

Lily frowned her face taking on what James called her motherly look. “You don’t need to worry now. Sirius will clear things up when your better.”

James sighed, causing Lily to lean closer. A wan smile filled James’s face. “I’m fine, Lils.”

“You are not ‘fine’.” Tears began to fall down Lily’s cheeks, and she hastily wiped them with the sleeve of her robes. “You would have died, if they hadn’t gotten you here as soon as they did. If that dagger would have been further to right, it would have hit your heart.”

“But I am fine now.”

“Always such a child!”

“How long have I been here?”

“Two days now, it will probably be another three days before they let you out. And, perhaps, a few weeks before you are allowed to return to work.”

“Are those Moody’s orders, or yours?”

"Both." Lily said giving her husband a severe look. "I don't want another scare like this, James!"

"As long as Voldemort is alive, Lily, there will be scares and close calls." James paused to regain his breath. "We can't just hide Lily... hiding does not work. We discovered that with Harry."

Lily rested her head in her hands. "I know. I'm tired of the fear! I'm just tired of everything." Lily exclaimed even as the door to the ward opened, causing Lily to look up. Her face softened. "He's awake," she called to the newcomers.

James smiled when he saw Sirius. "Good someone who can tell me what the hell happened."

Lily glared at Sirius, causing his friend to blush. "Perhaps, later, Mate." Then, as Black moved closer to the bed, he whispered. "When Lily is not around."

"Sirius, James needs his rest!"

"How can he rest with the questions that are driving him insane?" The two were soon arguing as they always did.

Still hanging back, Dorian just watched his father. James smiled and nudged his head toward the bickering pair, causing his son to erupt with laughter.

"What's funny?" Sirius asked.

"Perhaps, you two should have married. You have the bickering couple down pat."

"I would never marry that man, even if he were the last in the world!"

"Same here... but about marrying Lily."

"Nice recovery," Dorian said, nudging his uncle in the ribs.

"He is getting as bad as his mother doing that." Sirius complained, rubbing his sore ribs.

James shook his head and returned his attention to his wife. "Please, Lils, I need to know what happened."

Lily just nodded her head and looked away.

Sirius pulled over a seat for himself, while Dorian sat at the foot of his father's bed. "Well, it wasn't one of the Order's better nights... that's for sure. Both Podmore and Pierce were killed, and four of us were injured. Overall, I would say, we got out lucky. Remus was hit with one of the curses, nothing serious. In fact, he was in and out. Bill was hit with a dagger along the side of his face at the beginning. He will have a scar there for the rest of his life."

"What about the assassin?"

"He escaped. I brought you directly here, so I wasn't involved in the search. But I heard that there was not a trace of where he disappeared to."

James pressed the back of his head into his pillow.

"We should leave him to get some rest." Lily stated firmly.

Not willing to argue with her the other rose and walked to the door. Sirius, however, paused in the doorway.

"Oh, Prongs, I will be expecting payment soon."

"Payment?"

"Remember our bet... Pierce did have some pretty good information."

James smiled haughtily. "You can't bleed a turnip now can you, Padfoot, old friend."

Sirius laughed. "I guess you can't." He said as he left the room.

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Harry stumbled into his father's chamber, every step bringing him further pain. The two days he had spent in hiding had taken their toll on his body. His cheek burned where James Potter had hit him with

the Sectumsempra curse. His messy black hair lay limply against his forehead, making it hard to see.

"Father?" He whispered hoarsely.

Voldemort turned in his seat and seeing his son in such a pathetic state- rose to help him into a soft armchair. He, then, removed his wand and began to heal his tattered son. "I am glad you found your way home." Voldemort stated simply. "I had sent out many Death Eaters, but they all proved incompetent."

Harry only nodded his head. The chair was so comfortable. He could almost fall asleep in it. "Pierce is dead father."

Voldemort smiled sincerely, as he embraced the exhausted young man. "You performed that task magnificently. You gave me so much more, then what I had asked for."

Harry returned his father's smile. "I am glad that I have pleased you."

Voldemort returned to his armchair. "I feared that you would never return."

"They had placed an anti-apparate charm on the warehouse and surrounding area. I choose instead to lay quiet for a few days before I even attempted to return to your side." Harry said simply, fighting the urge to close his eyes.

"That was very wise of you." Voldemort closed his eyes as he continued the conversation. "James Potter is alive."

Harry said nothing in reply.

"Why did you not kill him?" Voldemort's snake eyes closed in on Harry.

Harry remained silent. This line of thought deeply troubled him. It frightened him that he did not know whether he had just missed, or had chosen to do so. "I don't know. I was in a hurry, and I just threw."

Voldemort nodded his head. "I killed my muggle father and his parents. He deserved his death for making my life pure hell." The Dark Lord's eyes rested contently on Harry. "It is a fate I saved you from. Dumbledore and your 'parents' would have destroyed you, throwing you against me in a futile attempt to kill me."

"I know better than to except their lies."

"Yes," Voldemort smiled. "I do believe you do. They back up their lies with little bits of truth. You see, Harry, in every lie one can find little truths. One only has to look far enough."

Harry nodded. "Always the teacher."

A smirk fell on the Dark Lord's face. "I did try to become a Professor at Hogwarts once. Dumbledore, however, declined. Ironically, they have not been able to hold a single Defense against the Dark Arts teacher since."

"Did you hex it?"

"Yes," Voldemort said stretching in his seat. "You are tired and need rest."

Harry rose carefully from the chair and moved to the door. "Thank-you, father, for all you have done for me."

"You are my son."

"I love you, too." Harry whispered as he turned leaving to return to his own room.

Once there, Harry sank into his bed not even bothering to change into his pajamas. Hiding his face in the comforting pillows, he erased from his mind the questions his target had presented to him. With these thoughts out of mind, he allowed sleep to finally overtake him.

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Author's Note: Next chapter is entitled Another Mission. Expect the latest chapter sometime next Friday.

## Another Mission

Dumbledore sat in the kitchen of Number Twelve Grimmauld Place, stroking his long beard as he examined the locket that was laid before him. To his left, Molly Weasley stood silently.

“Thank-you, Molly, for your diligence in finding this.”

Mrs. Weasley blushed slightly. “What do you plan to do with it, Albus?”

“It must be destroyed.” Dumbledore sighed. “If only I knew how many of these Tom made, because I am certain there are more than one. The notebook Neville, Ron, and Hermione destroyed was a Horcruxes. To discover how many more exist, I will need the help of an old friend.”

Mrs. Weasley tilted her head to the side.

“Horace Slughorn,” Dumbledore continued. “Tom was a favorite of his, and I believe he might provide information that would solve our conundrum.”

A new figure entered the room. “Dumbledore, we just stopped a Death Eater raid.” Kingsley Shacklebolt directed to Dumbledore. “We need you down at the Ministry, to question some of the captured Death Eaters.”

Rising from his chair, Dumbledore glanced down at the silver watch and frowned. “Molly, I need you to guard this watch. When I return, I will destroy it.”

Mrs. Weasley picked up the pocket watch and placed it in one of her pockets. “It is safe with me, Albus.”

“Once again, Molly, thank-you.” The aged headmaster said, then turned to Shacklebolt. “We mustn’t keep the Minister waiting.”

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"I am not here for 'your' amusement, Draco." Harry stated firmly, while holding back the urge to laugh.

Draco Malfoy froze, but seeing the amused glint in his friend's eyes chose to continue. "I want details! Weasel-bait has a right to hear how his brother's face was ruined. I would also like to tell Potter how his father almost died."

Harry's hands grasped the end of the chair's arm. "There isn't much to tell. Weasley was my path out, and then Potter got in my way." His hand moved without thought to his healing cheek. "It still burns," he muttered.

"Shame you didn't kill him." Malfoy drawled. "God I hate that brat son of his! I'm glad you look nothing like him."

Harry froze slightly. "It is only a technicality that I am related to them."

"You are nothing like them." Draco quickly added. "The Potter brat is just as bad as the Weasley twins, especially since they took him under their wings. Hogwarts has really gone downhill! Get rid of the trash, and it would return to the caliber it was before."

Harry's face dimmed at the mention of Hogwarts, knowing that soon Draco would be leaving him. "You sound like my father." A small smile replaced the scowl that had formed on Harry's face. "He has great plans for Hogwarts along with the rest of the Wizarding World."

An envious look appeared on Draco's face. "If only we all had your luck."

Harry's eyebrows rose.

"To be raised as the Dark Lord's son and heir, that is a fate many would kill to have. You also don't have to sit behind a desk, being taught by mudblood lovers! I would do anything to be out there."

"The job is not all it seems to be." Harry glanced away from his friend. "Some of the traitors really know how to fight."

"Referring to the Emmeline Vance job?"



Harry nodded. "She presented the most challenge. It was partially my fault for not being as cautious." Harry paused, thinking back to that moment. "In the fight, she knocked off my mask. She hesitated, which was her downfall. She couldn't kill me, because she could only see her best friend's son."

A cold smile crept on to the blonde's face. "The expression on her face must have been priceless."

"An expression of horror." Harry stated lightly. "If she hadn't seen my face, she might have won the duel. Instead, she let her emotions take control of her."

Draco's smile became more pronounced. "She aimed to 'save' you. Why do they always believe that we are in need of saving from the darkness?"

"The same reason they believe my father is evil."

"Ignorance. The blind leading the blind."

The door to the sitting room suddenly opened, and Voldemort entered. It was easily discerned that he was in a rage. His pale face was livid. Upon his entry, Draco fell into a bow, as Harry rose to greet his father.

"The Ministry and Order have interfered in yet another one of my raids!" His eyes moved over Harry's form. "Nymphadora Tonks is responsible for the latest crackdown by the Ministry. I want you to rid me of her."

Harry's eyes darkened slightly, which his father quickly caught.

"What has he said to you?" Voldemort pointed toward Draco.

"Nothing," Harry was quick to say. "I was just expecting more time here."

"Leave, Malfoy." Like everyone else, Malfoy quickly obeyed the Dark Lord's order. With Draco gone, Voldemort cupped his hands under Harry's chin, raising it until he could clearly see into his emerald eyes. "What is troubling you? You look as if you haven't slept in days." The

Dark Lord with one finger traced the black ellipses that were formed under his son's eyes.

Harry could not bring himself to look away, but still found he could not answer his father's question. In the back of his mind, he could feel his father tugging into his memories. Before his eyes, he suddenly saw Pierce. The dead man opened his mouth and spoke the words that haunted his thoughts, 'Have you ever questioned why some of them were killed'. His father delved further into the memory, until he suddenly withdrew from Harry's mind.

"Never question what you have done, Harry. You are nothing more than a good son, who does as his father bids. If I could I would punish Pierce for the harm his words have done, but I can do nothing."

Harry's demeanor softened. "How-."

"Shh. You are not to trouble yourself with that. What we have done is to make our lives safe. If we had allowed some of them to live, we might have died long ago. It is for our protection that we kill." Voldemort enveloped his son in a hug. "You will remain here, and rest."

"No," Harry said steadily. "I will take this mission for you."

"You will only watch her. If, however, you are given the perfect opening, act on it." Voldemort eyed Harry carefully. "You are too selfless at times. When you return, I promise you that you will be given a long rest."

"Thank-you, father." Harry said, as he moved to leave the room.

Voldemort stopped him suddenly. "Remember this Harry, his words meant nothing. He knows nothing of which he speaks."

As Harry began to leave the room, he paused briefly. Looking over his shoulder at his father, he forced a smile on to his face. "I will keep your words in mind."

---

Diagon Alley was a buzz of activity, as students of Hogwarts came to buy their items that were needed for the new school year. Sitting at Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlor, Harry could almost forget that there was a war being waged. He felt some remorse knowing that soon his father's war would spread even into the carefree atmosphere of Diagon Alley. For a moment longer he surveyed the crowds of families moving about there business, before he returned his attention back to his target.

Tonks stood out among the crowd with her bubblegum colored hair, which she currently had spiked. She seemed to favor it that way, for in the three days that Harry had been observing her, she keep returning to that particular look.

Today the Auror had company in the form of Kingsley Shacklebolt. They appeared to be waiting for someone. Harry frowned as he watched them examine the crowd. Raising a Daily Prophet, he hid his face, as their eyes moved toward the ice cream parlor. After a few moments, Harry lowered the paper. His emerald eyes catching every move the pair made.

To the left, a group of people walked up to the two Aurors. Harry recognized many members of the group. The four Weasley children were easily distinguished by the red hair they all shared. They appeared to be accompanied by their mother. He also picked out Neville Longbottom, who had his grandmother standing near him. The girl with the brown hair he did not recognize, so he skimmed over her until his eyes fell on the last two of the group, a red-haired woman with emerald eyes and a boy, who closely resembled her save for his hazel eyes.

His eyes fell briefly to the Prophet he held, before returning to the group, which was walking toward Flourish & Blott's. The two Aurors' presence became apparent to Harry. They were there to protect Longbottom. Pushing back on the chair, Harry rose to leave. He would catch up to his target when she was alone.

---

Dorian Potter blinked, and when he looked back toward Fortescue's the teenager was gone, leaving him to question if the young man had

ever been there. His thoughts did not linger long on the matter, as he had not seen much of the teenager's features. Instead, his attention turned back to his mother, who was looking rather pale. Since his father's near death, his mother had looked ill. Dorian frowned knowing that she was not sleeping well and worried far too much.

"He's fine, mum."

Lily looked wistfully at her son. "To have the invincibility of youth," she whispered. "One day you will see that there is no such thing as immortality."

"One shouldn't linger on it." Dorian pointed out.

"I don't want to lose anymore of our family."

"You won't, mum."

Putting up a good show, Lily smiled for her son's benefit. "While you're making promises, can I get your word that this year we will not be receiving any owls from the Headmaster?"

"That I cannot promise you." Dorian stated with a mischievous light in his eyes, reminding Lily of James. "It's Fred and George's final year... they want to go out with a bang."

Lily moaned. "Shouldn't they be focusing on their N.E.W.T.'s?"

"The only reason they are coming back at all is because Mrs. Weasley is forcing them to."

"You are too much like your father."

Dorian smirked. "So I'm set on finding a beautiful witch?"

"Buttering me up will not make me less angry when the owls start coming!" Lily said before repeating her previous statement. "You're too much like your father."

Tonks moved to the pair and smiled. "After we finish at Flourish & Blott's, we will go to Quality Quidditch Supplies, so our young chaser can get his new broom."

"I can get a Firebolt, right?"

Lily sighed. "You can get the Firebolt, since both you and your father think you need it."

Dorian smiled and walked rapidly forward to tell his victory to the Weasley twins, who were both beaters on the Gryffindor team. Tonks, however, remained behind with Lily.

"Lily, I will be leaving once we get to Flourish & Blott's. Hagrid will be taking my place from there on."

"Where are you going?" Lily asked, her eyes narrowing on the younger woman.

"I just got a call from the office." Tonks sighed before continuing. "I'm hoping it won't take long. I really need some rest."

"It seems none of us have been sleeping well."

Tonks bit her lower lip. "I have the feeling that I am being watched."

Lily's mouth widened. "Tonks, perhaps, it would be best if you stayed at headquarters."

"I have no proof. I think most of the time, I'm being overly paranoid."

"I know that feeling."

Just ahead of the pair, Flourish & Blott's came into sight. Tonks smiled and gave Lily a brief hug.

"I'll be in touch."

---

Tonks had been alone in her small apartment for two hours now. Harry stretched his back, as he silently watched Tonk's apartment. It was the perfect opportunity and he saw no reason as to why he

should not act on it. Removing his wand from his pocket, he began to leave his hiding place.

In the back of his mind, he felt his father's familiar presence, and wondered why he was contacting him now.

*'Harry, I need you to forget the half-blood and go lead my Death Eaters. They have engaged themselves with the Order of the Phoenix.'*

*'How does it fare?'*

*'We are losing. That is why I need you there.'*

The location entered Harry's head. *'I will arrive immediately.'*

*'Bring them my wrath, my son.'*

With those parting words, Voldemort retreated from Harry's mind. Harry looked up at the now darkened apartment, and knew where his target had gone. Perhaps, he would still be able to complete this mission after all. Closing his eyes, Harry apparated to where his father's Death Eaters waged war.

## A Lost Battle

Harry landed in an abandoned industrial section of London. The buildings had long since fallen into disarray from the lack of human maintenance. Harry wordlessly pulled up his hood, as Lucius Malfoy approached him. The Death Eater bowed politely to his master's heir.

"The Order has just received added reinforcements from the Aurors." The Death Eater paused waving to where the battle was being waged. "The situation is hopeless."

Harry's face hardened, assuming the role that he played. "My father did not find this 'situation' hopeless, Malfoy. So if I were you, I would hold my tongue."

The older man reddened at the insult to his honor. "If my Lord wishes to continue this fray, then we should go immediately."

Harry nodded coldly and followed the senior Malfoy down the abandoned passageways of the factory district. Ahead he could hear the sounds of spells being cast, people shouting, and spells smashing into the cement walls. The two increased their pace, as they neared the battle.

With the battle in sight, Malfoy turned to Harry. "Good luck, my Lord."

Harry gave a brief nod before entering the fray with his wand in his right hand. With efficiency, he cast a spell that he had seen Dolohov use, causing zigzagging flames to exit from his wand's tip. The spell hit its intended target causing him to fall instantly to the ground dead.

"*INCENDIO*," his voice shouted, turning his wand on a fast approaching Auror. The man screamed in pain as the flames engulfed him. Harry quickly turned his attention to his new attacker. "*SECTUMSEMPRA!*" His spell hit the man's face causing him to collapse.

Harry inhaled sharply catching his breath. His eyes assessed their plight with one glance. It would be a toss-up on who would win this skirmish. His hand reached into his robe and removed one of the few

daggers that he had with him. Swiftly, he tossed it, saving the life of a Death Eater.

He noticed to his left, Bellatrix was fighting her traitorous cousin, Sirius Black. Before his eyes he saw her suddenly fall before Black, as one of his spells broke through her defenses. His heart seemed to stop, as he watched Black loom before her with his wand pointed at her head.

The initial shock wore off, and Harry ran to Bellatrix's aid. Leveling his wand with Black's chest, Harry came to a stop.

"Walk away, Black." He whispered in a menacing voice.

Sirius immediately removed his wand from Lestrage, and moved it to cover the newcomer. "Ah, Voldemort's little ickle son!"

Gasping for air, Bellatrix turned her head, until she saw Harry. "Marvolo, leave!" She commanded.

Harry's eyes shifted to look at her feeble form. "You're in no condition to finish this duel. You will apparate back."

Bellatrix tried to stand, but found herself unable to perform even that simple task. "I can't."

"You will." Harry ordered, this time not taking his eyes off of Black.

Sensing the futility of arguing with the stubborn youth, Bellatrix apparated back to the Dark Lord's lair, leaving Harry to fight Black alone.

"Brave of you, boy." Sirius stated calmly. "Unfortunately, I doubt my dear cousin would do the same for you."

"You might be surprised."

The two combatants eyed each other, daring the other to make their move. It was Harry, who initiated their duel, by throwing a stinging hex Black's way. The older one did not wait long to return a few of his own jinxes, which Harry blocked with a shielding charm.



The two found themselves moving through the edges of the battle in a tedious routine of blocking and jinxing. They found themselves nearing an ancient wall of one of the factories. It was at this moment that Harry got through an Expelliarmus Charm, causing Black's wand to fall harmlessly into Harry's outstretched hand.

"You should have listened to me, Black, and just walked away."

Sirius' face was set in a grim façade, as he expected death.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw James dueling another Death Eater. Their eyes met briefly, and then James suddenly pointed his wand in the assassin's direction. Sirius smirked suddenly, only to suddenly duck when James's curse was sent off target by the Death Eater he was fighting. The curse instead hit the cement wall hard, causing it to crumble. Both Sirius and the assassin were hit with the spray of debris.

After a few moments, Sirius rose slowly, and then began to brush off the dust that clung to him. He started to cough fitfully, as the dust attacked his lungs.

"Damn it, James!" Sirius said between coughs, though his friend was no longer in sight.

His gray eyes landed on the crumpled form of the assassin, who appeared to be unconscious. Shaking, Sirius walked over to the figure and shook him. There was no response. He pressed two fingers to the youth's throat and felt a weak pulse. The assassin's face still remained hidden behind his mask.

A misfired spell reminded him of the battle that was taking place around him. Picking up the battered and bloodied assassin, Sirius quickly apparated to Number Twelve Grimmauld Place where Dumbledore was bound to be waiting.

Still holding the unconscious assassin over his shoulder, Sirius quickly moved upstairs and placed him in one of the bedrooms before rushing to get Dumbledore. He found the Headmaster getting ready to Floo to the battle.

“Albus,” he called hurriedly. “I have him.”

Dumbledore immediately stopped and without further use of words followed Sirius to the bedroom. The Headmaster moved to the motionless form that lay on the bed. Raising his wand, he began to heal some of the young man’s wounds. With the assassin’s life no longer in danger, Dumbledore’s hands gently began to remove the hood.

He suddenly froze. Sirius moved to stand beside the blanched Headmaster. His own face paled instantly.

“Harry?” He croaked, when he saw the sixteen year old that closely resembled his best friend.

Dumbledore’s eyes closed tightly. He shaking took a few steps back, before meeting Sirius’s eyes.

“How are we going to tell James and Lily?” Sirius said waving his hand toward Harry. “That we failed their son.”

Dumbledore was about to answer when the door opened. James Potter stepped in breathing hard. “I’m sorry, Sirius. I didn’t mean for the spell to do that. I heard you caught the assassin-.”

Sirius watched as James’s eyes widened in disbelief. “James,” Sirius called, as his friend quickly retreated from the room and the truth of his son’s identity.

## Never Easy

"That is not my son!" James said feverishly, as he paced in the drawing room.

Sirius Black and Remus Lupin exchanged long looks. James had been hostile since they had cornered him. Sirius sighed, turning his attention back to his pacing friend, who would on occasion run his hands through his already unruly hair.

"Would you stop pacing, mate?" Sirius asked finally.

James glared at him and continued to do so.

"James, this is not helping." Remus said, as he moved to sit in one of Number Twelve Grimmauld Place's over-stuffed sofas.

Sirius frowned. He looked briefly at Remus, who was looking extremely ill, as the full moon had only been a few days ago. "James, why don't we all have a seat?"

Once again, the only response Sirius gained was a glower.

Remus leaned back into the sofa, accepting its support. "It is Harry, who is lying in that room."

"No-."

"I know it is not the Harry you would have raised, James." Remus said interrupting James's rant. "Voldemort has twisted him."

"He is responsible for the deaths of others!" James finally slouched down beside Remus. "He tried to kill me!"

"He was raised by the Dark Lord!" Sirius pointed out. "What would you expect him to be teaching Harry to do?"

James began to rub his eyes vigorously. "I'm still hoping to wake up from this nightmare. He was better off thought dead."

"But he isn't dead, James, it is a reality that you have to face, not only for yourself, but for Lily and Dorian." Lupin said, as he looked at his

struggling friend. "I know it will not be easy... it is never easy, but all the same, you have to cross that bridge."

James looked up at Remus when he mentioned Lily's name. "She doesn't need to know."

"Harry is her son, too." Remus pointed out to his friend. "She needs to hear it from you, not from others."

"Remus is right, James." Dumbledore said, as he stepped into the room.

"It will only hurt her more." James whispered mostly to himself. "He belongs to Voldemort not us. Harry will only see that."

Dumbledore nodded his head. "It is true that he is polluted with Voldemort's lies, but that does not mean that there is not hope. You are giving up on Harry far too easily."

"You didn't see the look in his eyes that night." James said tumultuously. "There was nothing there!"

Silently, Sirius agreed. In the few moments he dueled with Harry, the youth's eyes had remained cold and devoid.

"James, all I ask is for both you and Lily to try to reach him."

James looked out the window, his lips tightened. "I do not want to get her hopes up. She's been through so much."

"Lily will want to try." Lupin urged his friend.

James gave a curt nod. "Should Dorian be told as well?"

"That will solely be up to Lily and you." Dumbledore paused. "Though it is possible he might hear from other students." Dumbledore looked meaningfully at James.

"Death Eaters' children? Why? What would they have to gain?"

“One curious brother, and then, perhaps, a location. I especially expect young Draco Malfoy to play a key factor.” The aged Headmaster bowed his head. “It is your choice.”

“Choice?” James laughed bitterly. “Have him find out through a Malfoy.”

Dumbledore nodded his head. “Perhaps we should all go up and check on our guest?” Without waiting for replies, Dumbledore started out of the room.

The three Marauders eyed each other before following. James was the last to leave the room, finding himself reluctant to meet his son. Once in the room, his face was like stone, as he stared at the sleeping form of his son. Dumbledore had just leaned down, touching a chain that hung around Harry’s neck. James saw the Headmaster’s eyes narrow, as he peered down on the shield-shaped pendant that hung on the silver chain. Dumbledore tried to slip it over the sleeping youth’s neck only to have his hand shocked.

“Very clever of you, Tom.” The Headmaster said aloud. “I believe we have found another Horcrux.”

Harry’s body burned with pain, and a moan escaped his lips. He had felt a slight tingling and heard muted voices around him discussing something. He picked out the word ‘Horcrux’. His mind suddenly became more aware, and he fought to stay conscious. Slowly, Harry forced his eyes to open. The first person his eyes focused on was the most hated of his father’s enemies, Albus Dumbledore.

The mudblood-lover reached next to him, grabbing a silver goblet. “I think this might be welcomed.”

Harry eyed the cup, before turning his attention to the other three figures in the room. He recognized them, but chose not to acknowledge their presence. His head lulled to his left, away from the goblet.

“I promise that it is not poisoned, Harry.” Dumbledore said friendly enough.

Harry answered by closing his eyes, willing death to come.

“You will have to drink eventually, Harry.”

Still nothing. The Marauders frowned. James looked at the frail adolescent and sighed.

“You do go by Harry, right?” James asked, unsure if Voldemort had changed his son’s name.

There was no confirmation or denunciation.

“Your wounds are not severe enough that you will die from them.” Dumbledore continued. “It would be better for all involved if you would drink.” The only response Dumbledore received was Harry tightening his lips. “In that case, we shall let you rest for awhile. But before I go, I am curious to know whether you would allow me to examine the necklace you are wearing?”

A smile crept on to Harry’s face. As consciousness flitted away, he whispered. “Examine it all you like, if you can get it off.”

---

James lounged restlessly in a chair before the fireplace, waiting for Lily to Floo to Number Twelve Grimmauld Place. His thoughts centered on one thing, how was he going to tell Lily? His mind went through the different scenarios, none so far had showed any promise. James exhaled his breath rapidly. He had never been good with words.

The fire before him turned green, and before long Dorian exited it, followed closely by his mother. Lily’s eyes instantly began to brush over James’s appearance. James smiled reassuringly for his wife, though he felt as if he were about to loose his stomach.

“Dorian, why don’t you give me and your mother some time alone?”

Dorian’s eyes narrowed apprehensively, but he chose not to comment on his suspicions. “Are the Weasleys here?”

“No, you will have to entertain yourself. But, the second floor is off limits.” James looked strictly at his son over the rims of his eyeglasses. “Do I make myself clear?”

“Is there any particular reason-.”

“Because your father told you that it is forbidden.” James said sternly.

“I’ll stay down here then.” Dorian quickly added to his sentence. “I will also remain far away from the door.”

“Thank-you.”

Once Dorian had left, James turned warily to Lily, whose interest had peaked.

“Is everything alright, James?”

James motioned to a chair that was beside his own. “Mostly, yes.”

“You’re being awfully suspicious.” Lily’s emerald eyes suddenly looked tired, as she accepted the chair.

James rubbed his temples. “We found some interesting news today.”

“Oh?”

“I’m sure you heard of the battle that took place tonight.” James started slowly. “It was neither a clear victory nor defeat for us. However, we did manage to capture a very important figure.”

Lily’s brow furrowed. “James, I know you have something important to tell me, because you’re beating around the bush. You always do when you’re not sure.”

“We caught the assassin.” James throat suddenly tightened.

“James?”

Her husband’s mouth moved, but no sound came out.

James exhaled and looked wretchedly at her. "Lils, I can't think of any better way to tell you this. Voldemort didn't kill Harry."

Lily's eyes widened.

James cursed himself for the hope that he saw in her beautiful green eyes. "Lils, he was using him as his assassin." He cursed himself further when he saw the horrified look on her face.

---

"WHAT?" Voldemort's eyes narrowed in fury. "*AVADA KEDAVRA*," the Dark Lord bellowed.

Malfoy flinched, as the Death Eater beside him fell to the marbled floor dead. Lucius wanted to flee, as Voldemort rose and walked to him. The Dark Lord's hand lashed out against him hitting him across the face.

"My Lord, there was nothing we could do. Black apparated too soon."

Voldemort wrapped his thin fingers in Lucius's hair and pulled roughly, so the Death Eater could clearly see his face.

"MY SON IS IN DUMBLEDORE'S HANDS." Furiously, he yanked Malfoy's head. "MY HEIR! IS IN DUMBLEDORE'S HANDS! I WILL NOT BE THWARTED BY DUMBLEDORE!"

Snape watched from the shadows, hiding his amusement.

"What is wrong with this picture, Lucius?" Voldemort whispered dangerously low.

"We can get him back." Lucius answered quickly.

Voldemort's eyes still flickered with fire. "You better get him back, Malfoy, or you will be sharing the same fate as him." He pointed to the lifeless body of the Death Eater.

Malfoy rose, visibly shaken. He bowed to Voldemort, before rushing out of the room.



Voldemort began to breathe regularly, but it did not last long. “*REDUCTO!*” A table to his left disintegrated. “SNAPE!”

Severus Snape reluctantly left his hiding spot. “Yes, my Lord?” He swept into a bow.

“You will help Lucius in this matter.” Voldemort voice sounded almost calm. “I need you to tell my son that he is to remain well.”

“How will I know him, my Lord?” Snape asked.

“He looks almost exactly like James Potter.” Voldemort smirked, and knew that behind Snape’s cool exterior, the potion’s master was shocked. “I believe you were in the same year at Hogwarts.”

“Your son should not be hard to find.” Snape bowed and prepared to leave.

“Snape, time is of the essence, as my son is very obedient. He will follow my previous orders.”

“I will waste no time.” Snape’s billowing robes whipped behind him, as he left.

### Interrogation aka. A Tad Bit of Explaining...

The room around Harry was hazy. Rubbing his eyes, he knew the charm he had placed on his eyes had been lifted, and without a wand there was no renewing the charm. Until then, Harry would have to make do with his lack of eyesight. Swinging his legs over the side of the bed, he sat up wavering. His head throbbed from sleeping far too long. When the room stopped moving, Harry stood on his trembling legs. His hands spread to his side to bring him balance. By now, he was certain that no one else was in the room.

Gradually, he walked to the closed door. Opening it, he used the hallway's wall to guide him to the stairs. His uncertain feet slowly descended the steps, toward what he believed to be the end. His head began to spin. With one missed step, Harry found himself tumbling down the remaining steps. The air was forced out of his lungs when he finally came to a stop on the main floor.

"That was quite a tumble." Harry recognized the voice as belonging to Dumbledore. "Here let me help you up."

Using his hands to rise himself into a sitting position, Harry pushed himself away from the blurred form of Dumbledore. A look of pure hatred filled his young face, as he spurned the older man's offer of help.

"I take it you wish to rise yourself?"

Backing into the wall, Harry used its support to pull himself up. His breathing was coming irregularly, but with great effort he brought it back to its normal rhythm.

"If you would follow me into the kitchen." Dumbledore waved what Harry assumed to be his arm.

Harry sneered. He refused to follow this man anywhere.

"There is no leaving this house, Harry. I have placed charms that will prevent you from doing so." The Headmaster paused. "The kitchen is quite nice you know."

Sighing, Harry followed his father's enemy into the kitchen. He could make out the forms of at least five other people in the room.

"Have a seat, Harry."

Harry hesitated before beginning to feel his way to a seat. He winced when he ran into the chair before. Haltingly, Harry pulled back that chair and sat in it awkwardly. His eyes scanned the people, who sat at the table. He frowned when he was unable to distinguish their faces, because of his blurred vision.

"Are you alright, Harry?" The Headmaster's voice cut through the quiet setting of the kitchen.

Harry answered with a terse nod.

"Running into a chair could be surmised as not being well." Harry recognized the voice of the werewolf.

Harry fought the urge to reply, but just stared blankly away from the others. His attention returned to them, when he felt a hand touch his shoulder.

"I think these might help." He heard Dumbledore's voice.

He felt eyeglasses being pressed against his right cheek. Harry took them, only to throw them across the room with disdain.

The Headmaster continued unperturbed. "Perhaps, if someone else would offer you glasses you would accept them?"

Harry ignored his offer. He heard a chair being pushed back and footsteps coming toward him. Through the lenses that were being drawn to his face, he saw the face of a red-haired woman. Her emerald eyes were filled with hope, as she scanned his face. The glasses came to rest on his face, and he continued to watch her. His eyes widened immensely when her arms embraced him. Never before in his life had he felt so unsure of himself, so he remained rigidly still.

Lily Potter released him slowly before being prompted back to her seat. Harry continued to follow her with his eyes, uncertain of what to think of her. His eyes then scanned over the rest in the room. Mad-Eye Moody sat at the end of the table, his sharp eyes never leaving Harry. On Moody's right side sat the two elder Potters and Sirius Black. Across from them sat the werewolf, Remus Lupin.

"I am sure you are hungry." Dumbledore said from his new seat across from Harry.

Food suddenly appeared on the table. Harry felt his mouth began to water at the tempting aroma. He forced down his hunger, when Dumbledore offered him a bowl that appeared to contain some form of soup. This time Harry shook his head, and then continued to glower at Dumbledore. The Headmaster placed the bowl down in front of Harry.

"It is there when you want some." Dumbledore said benevolently, as he looked over the top of his spectacles.

Harry returned the Headmaster's gaze.

"Enough of this!" Mad-Eye rose from his seat, as he strode toward Harry. "What is the Dark Lord planning?"

Harry remained emotionless. His eyes now bore into the head Auror.

Moody's scared face frowned, as his magical eye examined the dark haired youth.

"Wouldn't you like to know?" Harry whispered.

"You little-."

"Alastor!" Dumbledore warned. "We agreed."

Moody's frown became even more pronounced, but he returned to his seat.

Harry's stomach growled loudly. His eyes landed on the food before him. In defeat, Harry took the bowl and began to spoon the content into his mouth.

"When is the last time you ate?" The Potter woman asked.

Harry eyed her, feeling the uncertainty he had underwent when she had hugged him. Was there any harm in answering her?

"I've been busy."

"Any bodies we should be aware of?" Moody asked.

"Important matters called me away, or yes there would have been one."

"Who?"

"I doubt that the target is still on my father's priority list."

"I hate to inform you, but Voldemort is not your father." Moody stated loudly.

Harry smiled. "Not by blood perhaps, but by something greater."

Many eyes around the table rose.

"You are aware of whom you are, yet you carry out such atrocities!" Moody rose from his chair again. "Albus, he belongs in Azkaban."

"Alastor, Voldemort has not been truthful with Harry."

"He was truthful enough." Harry stated. "He described you well, Dumbledore. You truly are the master of manipulation." Harry rose. "I think I will return to my 'room'."

As he left, Harry heard them rise to follow, but Dumbledore called them back. Sighing, Harry was glad to be alone, as he flung himself down on the bed.

## A Fragmented Mirror

*The boy's diminutive hands clasped the wand, which seemed too big for them, until they hurt. His large emerald eyes stared down the long corridor with apprehension rising up his throat. Despite the fear, he felt his legs carry him steadily forward. His heart increased its pace, as a sense of claustrophobia set in. Yet his small legs continued. He wanted them to stop. The boy was close to panicking now. Light from the room radiated toward him, and he began to regret.*

*He tried to stop, but continued onward. His mouth opened to call for help, but no words escaped. He could not stop, not now.*

---

Harry rose from the bed and began to pace with unsteady breath. He dried his eyes with his sleeve. The dream had been haunting him ever since the Pierce mission. He silently cursed the man. Moving his hands through his hair, Harry explored the contents of the room.

He opened the closet and was surprised to see that it held clothes that appeared to be for him. Pushing the clothes to one side, Harry examined the shelves of the closet. On one shelf, he discovered his shoes. He tossed them aside. The other shelves were empty. Harry reached over head and felt around the very top shelf. His hands connected with a metal object. Carefully, Harry brought it into sight.

Harry's reflection met him, as he stared into the silver mirror. His almond-shaped emerald eyes that peered back at him were more sunken in then he remembered them. The messy black hair for once hung limply.

"You look a mess." He whispered, laughing silently. Anger then welled up inside him, and he flung the mirror across the room. The sound of the glass breaking echoed hollowly in the sepulchral room.

He blinked, the noise bringing him out of his thoughts. Though he knew noise would come, Harry had not expected it. His thin lips tighten, as he walked over to pick up a fragment. His father's words played over in his head, as Harry stared at the jagged end of the reflective piece.

One of his dull eyes returned his gaze. Deliberately, Harry pressed the piece into his skin.

---

James leaned back in his chair, eyeing the clock. His shift would be over soon, and then watching Harry would be Dumbledore's task. His head sank back into the chair, knowing that he should check on Harry one more time before Dumbledore arrived. Stretching, he rose. The night had been long and uneventful with his charge sleeping through it.

He wished that he had not had to spend it alone. Lily had taken Dorian home. The boy had taken the news of his brother fairly well, but of course he had never known Harry. Sirius had been gone with Moody to fill out the necessary paper work concerning Harry. Dumbledore had warned both Lily and him that Harry would probably be taken into the Ministry's custody. The news had greatly upset Lily.

He sighed as he reached the room that belonged to his son. James frowned slightly. It was still so hard to believe that Harry was alive. His hand clasped the cold doorknob. The first place he looked was the bed, and he was astonished to find it empty. His heart quickened with the aspect of having his ward hiding in the house.

Turning James noticed Harry bunched up using the wall as a back brace. His face was bleached white, making his glazed eyes stick out.

"Harry, are you alright."

The young man remained silent, so James moved nearer, bending down to examine him further. James's hand grasped Harry's wrist. Withdrawing his hand, James saw that it was stained with crimson blood.

"God," he muttered. With shaking hands he quickly withdrew his wand. "*EPISKEY!*" The bleeding stopped and the gash began to heal. James reached for the other wrist, he was silently glad that Harry was too weak to resist. Muttering the spell once more, James breathed easier. "Why the hell did you do that!" James asked, as he pulled his son into his arms.

Harry's head lulled back, until it rest on James's shoulder, tears falling from his eyes.

James silently rocked back and forth until his son blacked out. Raising his wand once more, he sent his Patronus to greet Dumbledore.

"It will be alright." James found himself muttering aloud, despite the fact Harry could no longer hear him.

"James, is everything alright?"

"Albus, hurry."

The elderly man walked in and briefly examined the scene before him. "What happened?" He said, as he helped James lift Harry on to the bed. The Headmaster stopped suddenly when he saw a lightening bolt shaped scar on the young man's forearm. "Did he cut himself here?"

"No, he slit his wrists." James said glancing at the scar Dumbledore was examining with interest. "He needs to be taken to St. Mungo's."

"We will send for Madame Pomfrey immediately." Dumbledore interrupted James before he could argue. "We can not take Harry to St. Mungo's. He is considered a danger to the public. Alastor would never go along with it. James, if you would send the message to Poppy, and then bring water up that would be appreciated. We need to get fluids in him."

James nodded and left the room practically in a run. Dumbledore waited until he left, before he tried to wake Harry.

"Harry, I need to know how you got that scar." The Headmaster said sternly, peering down at the sleeping form. He gently shook the adolescent before asking again.

Harry's eyes weakly crack them open before closing. He mumbled something that Dumbledore could not understand. Then Harry said something he could. "I don't wear the marking of the hired hands."



Harry's voice trailed off, and Dumbledore knew he had returned to sleep.

Dumbledore's face was grimly set. "You have finally outfoxed me, Tom."

## -PART2- Riddle's Game

Two days after Harry's attempted suicide, the young man had begun to slowly recuperate. This put Dumbledore's mind at great ease, knowing that he would live. Now as Dumbledore surveyed the kitchen, which was filled with the most trusted members of the Order, he felt extremely tired. The past days had not been undemanding, but then again neither would the days to come.

He looked to James Potter, who sat uneasily. Dumbledore knew he suspected something. However, the Headmaster had decided not to disclose his thoughts with James that night.

"Alastor," Dumbledore started. "I need you to find a way to get Harry into my custody permanently."

"Albus, the boy is a murderer!" Moody stated. "The Minster of Magic will never agree to such an idea."

Dumbledore's face looked extremely drained. "Voldemort has manipulated the Prophecy. He has literally marked Harry as his equal. All this time, Voldemort has held the prophesied one, leading us all the while to believe that we had him in Neville. He has played his hand masterfully, until now." Dumbledore paused. "I am going to be taking Harry to Hogwarts for safekeeping, Alastor."

"I will get it cleared, Albus. Just promise me that he will never leave Hogwarts without your supervision."

"I will be sure of that." Dumbledore then turned to James. "I will need you to stay with Harry while he is at Hogwarts."

James nodded his head, though his eyes shot daggers at the old man. Dumbledore knew the look was because he had not been told of Riddle's manipulations before now.

"How do we get him destroy the Dark Lord when he calls him 'father'?" Tonks asked tentatively.

"We show him the truth." Dumbledore rubbed his eyes. "I will be talking with Harry over the school year, to convince him in the wrongness of Voldemort's actions. I am confident we will succeed."

"What about Neville?" James asked. "Are you certain that he is not the chosen one?"

"Neville is a powerful asset. However, after seeing the mark on Harry I am positive that it is him. Voldemort was quite meticulous in his handling of the Prophecy. Not only did Voldemort discreetly select his equal, he made certain that the boy had blackened hands." Dumbledore looked around the room at the many faces. "His work as an assassin for Voldemort was not just for the Dark Lord's convenience. Voldemort wanted him to appear beyond redemption."

"And it is our job to prove him wrong." Sirius said almost cheerfully.

Dumbledore nodded. His attention turned to the door where Snape stood in the doorway. "Severus, I was not expecting you."

Snape remained in the door way. "The Dark Lord wishes to give a message to his son."

Dumbledore froze. "What is his message?"

"That he wishes his son to remain well."

"You couldn't have come sooner, could you, Snape." James Potter caustically stated. "When did your Lord give you this message, hmm?"

"I ran into obstacles, Potter."

"Of course, 'obstacles'."

"James, this is not the time-." Dumbledore began.

"Don't you see-."

Dumbledore's scowl immediately stopped James's protests. "You may precede, Severus. Lily is with him now, but I am sure she will allow you some privacy."

"Thank-you, Headmaster." Snape smirked at James Potter, even as he spoke.

---

Harry stared at the emerald eyed woman, who would continuously push loose strands of his hair into place, if they had ever had a place. He was not use to this type of behavior, and most certainly did not know how to respond to it. Somehow, Harry found he could not tell the woman to stop. He closed his eyes, praying to wake up back in his father's fortress or anywhere away from this woman, who made him feel peculiar.

"Are you alright?" Her voice asked, cutting through his thoughts.

He nodded his head. Harry knew she was now accustomed to his nonverbal replies, which only irritated him further. He did not want to communicate with these people.

"You have really grown." She started. "You look so much like James."

Harry could not help but flinch. "I am not you son."

"I believe I remember bearing you." Lily Potter said a small smile touching her lips. "Then I raised you for a year, before he took you from us!"

"My father did that for my protection." Harry said calmly.

"Voldemort did it to use you!"

"I wouldn't expect you to understand. You're too clouded with Dumbledore's thinking to truly see."

"Are you sure it is not the other way around?"

Harry reflected silently. "Yes."

The door opened. "Potter, the Headmaster wishes to speak with you."

Lily frowned, looking down at Harry.

"I assure you, he will be fine when you return." Snape moved further into the room.

Lily nodded and reluctantly left.

"Snape," Harry pronounced the professor's name slowly.

"I have a message from the Dark Lord." Snape looked down on the fragile adolescent. "You are to remain well."

Laughter erupted from Harry's throat. "What side are you on, Snape?"

"You doubt the message comes from the Dark Lord?"

"No," Harry said, waving his scared wrist casually in front of the other man. "It just seems a little late."

Snape blinked, realizing that Harry was trying to gain access into his mind. "I ran into difficulties. The dear Headmaster did not believe we should meet."

"Traitors suffer horrible deaths." Harry said unblinkingly.

"Yes... you would know of that," Snape whispered indifferently. "All the same, it is well that I am quite loyal to my Lord."

Harry nodded his head, a small smile on his face. "Inform my father of my health. You are dismissed, Snape."

The potions master left the room, and Harry collapsed back into the pillows. He was magically worn from his attempts to enter Snape mind. The man was gifted in occlumency, enough that Harry was wary of him. Reservedly, he wondered why his father kept the weasel around. Harry could plainly see that the man played a game of his own design.

"Slimy, git." He whispered, as Lily Potter reentered the room. Then, he quickly pretended to be asleep to avoid the red-haired woman.

## Departure

Harry stepped out of the fireplace into the lair of his father's worst enemy. The Floo trip left him slightly dazed, as he was still regaining his strength. His eyes scanned the circular room with all its arched windows. Harry's eyes finally rested on the Headmaster's desk, where Dumbledore waited serenely. His blue eyes watched Harry with interest. The youth, however, refused to meet his gaze. His eyes instead scanned the portraits of the former Headmasters and mistresses. Behind him, he heard James Potter exiting the fireplace.

"Please have a seat," Dumbledore said sagely.

'He is clearly in his atmosphere.' Harry smirked. Instead of sitting, he walked over to a table that contained a group of silver instruments.

"Harry, please, have a seat. We have much to discuss." The Headmaster asked again.

"I have nothing to 'discuss' with blood traitors." Harry eyes caught the way both men paled.

James was watching his son with a hard gaze, while Dumbledore keep his features indecipherable. The Headmaster leaned forward, resting his elbows on his desk. His shrewd eyes did not miss any of Harry's movements.

"It is a discussion that will occur." Dumbledore paused. "Better to get our talk out of the way, instead of prolonging it."

Harry sighed loudly, tempted to fling the silver instruments on to the floor.

"They are just possessions."

Harry's head jerked up. He looked at Dumbledore with distrust, but he chose not to say anything. Instead, he moved to sit beside Potter. In his mind, however, he was building walls to prevent further free access on the Headmaster's part. Dumbledore smiled at Harry's compliance.

"The teachers are aware of your past. The students will remain uninformed for the most part. They will only be told that you have just recently been returned to your parents. To the students, the sole reason for your father's presence will be to reacquaint you to the Wizarding world. The only students, who will know your real past, will be certain children of members of the Order and of course those who you knew when you were with Voldemort."

Harry frowned. "One thing, he is not my father. He will never be. Secondly, you are actually going to place me among your students?"

The Headmaster's mouth twitched. "You will only be attending a few classes... to keep up appearances. The remainder of your time will be spent in your room, or in this office. You and I will converse on various items." Dumbledore straightened himself. "Hogwarts will be housing many Aurors, along with added protections. There is no escape."

Harry's face remained empty. "How can you be so convinced, Dumbledore? I believe that you could not stop me from leaving."

"With the help of a group of our former students, we have protected all passageways."

"Numerous Aurors per exit?" Harry asked mockingly.

Dumbledore nodded.

"I can still get past them, even without my wand." His eyes flickered dangerously. "I have it made past the Ministry's top agents before. Unfortunately here, some of your students might get in the way. What would their guardians say? Especially, when they find that you knowingly placed their children in danger."

Harry stopped in disbelief when the Headmaster's eyes twinkled.

"I do not think you are capable of doing such a crime."

"I have killed people before. It is not a hard task to do."

Harry despised the Headmaster's calm exterior, as he answered. "You only kill when ordered. You have never killed for pleasure."

The seat Harry had been sitting in fell backward, as he left it. His hand grasping a letter opener that lay on the desk, he arrived with it at Dumbledore's throat before either the Headmaster or James could react.

"You won't kill me, Harry." Dumbledore stated serenely.

Harry stared into the blue eyes that he had come to loathe. Out of the corner of his eyes, he saw James Potter with his wand pointed at him. Turning his attention back to the Professor, he brought the knife closer.

Dumbledore, however, still seemed unconcerned. "I can see it in your eyes, Harry. You do not delight in what you do for Voldemort." The old man motioned for James to lower his wand, which he did with great reluctance. "Put down the letter opener, Harry."

Harry glared at the Headmaster, before throwing the letter opener across the room sticking it in the wall. He felt Potter's hand grab his one arm pulling him back to his seat. Grudgingly he returned to sitting.

"Albus, I don't think this is a good idea." James's eyes straying to the letter opener, which remained firm in the wall. "He is too dangerous."

"I ask you to trust me in this matter, James." The headmaster rose from his chair. "You will technically be placed Gryffindor, though you will remain in a separate room with James."

James's eyes widened. "I am going to be sleeping in the same room as him!"

"I do not see a problem with this arrangement. I think that it would be the best for the two of you." Dumbledore smiled. "Harry, you will be joining the student body at the opening feast tonight, but after that James will take you to your quarters."

"What if I, or someone else, were to tell your secret, Dumbledore? There is no way they would allow you to keep me here."

"I have a feeling you will enjoy Hogwarts more than you would Azkaban." Dumbledore looked intently at the adolescent. "This is your last chance for redemption, Harry."

"The act of atonement made for a crime or offence. Before I can atone, I have to know my crime."

"Before the end, you will... if you don't already." Dumbledore said soberly.

Harry's eyes burned in rage. "The only 'sin' I have ever committed is being a good son."

Dumbledore looked, as if he were going to comment on Harry's statement, however, he chose not to. "The majority of your classes will not require the use of a wand. However, I have decided you will also take Defense against the Dark Arts. You will be given your wand for this class only."

Harry nodded his head, no longer caring.

"If there are no other questions, I believe we shall retreat to the Great Hall." Dumbledore rose. "You will be sitting with us at the staff table, James."

"What about Harry?"

"He will get acquainted with his fellow Gryffindors."

Harry found himself being led into the filling Great Hall. Dumbledore showed him to a seat and left him without a word. Now Harry nervously shifted, as he watched various members of Gryffindor sit down at the table. This place was Hell. Never before had he been around people of his own age, but compared to him they were little more than children.

He bowed his head, allowing his bangs to obstruct his face. Blocking out the sounds around him, Harry concentrated on his situation. There had to be some way to contact Draco, who would be sitting only a few tables away. However, Harry knew Dumbledore would make that feat almost impossible.



Movement to his right caused his curiosity to peak. Someone was actually going to sit by him. His emerald eyes met hazel.

"So you're the infamous Harry Potter?" The boy with auburn hair stated more then asked. "I'm Dorian Potter."

"My last name is Marvolo." Harry received no reaction.

"You look like a Potter."

"Shouldn't you be afraid of me?"

"Why?" Dorian asked. "It's hard to fear you, especially when you look just like dad."

Harry's brow furrowed. "You are annoying."

Dorian grinned. "Lots of people think so."

"Ickle Dorey-." One red-head twin began.

"Been staying out of trouble?" His twin finished.

Harry noticed the younger Potter cringe.

"You know I hate it when you call me that." Dorian said contorting his face in disgust.

One of the red-heads, eyes met those of Harry. Harry was not too surprised to see his face suddenly pale. His lips compressed into an exceedingly thin line. His eyes hardened as well.

"You could have killed our brother."

By this time his twin, who had finally noticed Harry, wore the same expression of disgust.

Harry knew them to be the twins that Draco had complained about so often.

"Dorian, you are not going to seriously be seen with him?" One said incredulously.

"He's my brother, George." Dorian said quietly.

"He's not safe." Fred Weasley pressed his twin's point.

"I did not almost kill your brother," Harry whispered calmly. He instantly hated his words. He had nothing to prove to them.

The twins looked dubiously at him.

"Those, who I choose to kill, end up dead. A few are destined to survive." Harry said indifferently.

The twins face expression had not changed, as they sat beside Dorian. On the other side of the table, a bushy brown haired girl followed closely by the youngest Weasley male and his sister arrived. Their reaction mirrored those of the Weasley twins. Ron Weasley looked repulsed to even be in the same room.

Harry took a distinct pleasure in their response to him. As his father would tell him, he was their better.

"What is Dumbledore thinking?" Ron exclaimed glaring at Harry.

Heads turned toward him, causing Dorian to flinch. "Ron, sit down and shut-up." Dorian continued when the stunned prefect obeyed. "Dumbledore is keeping him here to prevent Voldemort-." Dorian sighed, as the majority of the group recoiled at the mere mention of the Dark Lord's name. "To prevent Voldemort from reclaiming his prize. Our esteemed Headmaster would not be pleased, if we made all his planning fail."

Their section of the table fell quiet, though Harry still felt himself the object of many glares.

"Potter and the Weasels... oh, I seem to have forgotten the mudblood. Sorry, Granger-." Draco stopped, when his eyes landed on his childhood friend. His face broke into a calculating smile. "Marvolo." He said, nodding his head.

"Malfoy," Harry replied.

“You look like crap.”

The corners of Harry’s mouth twitch threatening to turn into a smile. “I had an incident.”

“I wouldn’t doubt it.” Malfoy stated with contempt, as his eyes scanned the group with disgust. “Being stuck with such filthy-.”

Draco stopped suddenly when he felt a presence behind him. He slowly turned to find James Potter standing behind him.

“Mr. Malfoy, I would take a seat at your House’s table.” James said coolly.

Malfoy shot Potter a defiant look, before walking briskly toward the Slytherin table. Harry watched him depart, as he did so, he used Legilimency to place a message in his friend’s mind.

‘Be sure my father knows that I am here, but be careful Dumbledore will be watching.’ At the last moment he added to his first message. ‘Don’t spread my true identity... I would rather not end-up in Azkaban.’

His concentration broke. Harry had always found both Legilimency and Occlumency to be wearing. Harry noticed that the senior Potter had returned to his place at the head table. As he had previously known, Harry was reminded once again that it would be hard to talk with Draco.

The first years were led into the room and the Sorting began. Harry did not pay close attention to the words the hat sung, instead he considered the jittery eleven year olds. He had been different at that age. By this time, he had already been doing his father’s bidding. His behavior had already been similar to an adult. A particular emotion rose in his chest, one that he had never felt before. He felt his face scrunch as he tried to identify the feeling. Harry frowned and then completely brushed it aside. He was not envious of their childhoods.

When the Sorting was completed, the Headmaster rose and spoke. The impression Harry gained, from the bored expressions on the

faces of the older students, was that Dumbledore said the same speech every year.

“Let the feast begin.” Dumbledore said cheerfully, and food magically appeared on the tables.

Harry only nibbled at what he took. His appetite had yet to return to normal. Silently, he cursed being surrounded by children.

There was a crash beside Harry, as Dorian Potter suddenly turned into a large canary. Then, suddenly, he returned to his normal form.

“That is getting old.” Dorian said frowning.

“But it still works.” Fred said.

“Quite efficiently too.” George added.

“A thing of beauty.” The two concluded together.

Dorian snorted. “Now I don’t have a knife.” He noticed Harry’s untouched knife. “Are you going to use that?”

Wordlessly, Harry grasped the knife’s handle, flipping so the handle was pointing toward Dorian.

“Thanks,” Dorian said slowly, still astounded by Harry’s swift move.

Harry shrugged and returned to staring at his scarcely eaten food. He was glad when the dinner finally ended. He instantly rose when James came to stand behind him.

“Well, we’re going to call it a night.” James told his younger son. “Your mother wanted me to remind you to behave.”

Dorian smiled. “She never gives up hope.”

James looked toward Harry, and simply stated. “No, she doesn’t.”

“Can I come with you two?”

James shook his head. "Perhaps, later." He, then, placed his hand on Harry's shoulder and began to lead him from the Great Hall.

Their quarters were not far from Dumbledore's office, and were out of the way from the student corridors. The quarters were actually composed into three different sections... a bedroom, living area, and a mini-bath. The quarters were furnished with a very Gryffindor feel.

Harry entered to the bedroom and prepared for sleep. Crawling under the sheets, Harry laid, waiting for sleep to come. Eventually, James entered and sat on the bed opposite of Harry, staring at him.

"If I promise not to kill you, will you stop staring at me?" Harry asked. "I can't sleep with you doing that."

James lay back in his bed, staring up at the ceiling. "I suppose that is a deal."

Harry grinned. "I suppose so."

Silence filled the room. Harry rolled onto his other side, trying to find a comfortable position. Pressing his head into the pillow, he found himself dreading the coming day.

## DADA

Oppressive darkness draped over the large chamber, of the kind no light could penetrate. Silence reigned over this separate realm. It had the feel of a death chamber, where its occupant waited for bereavement. Obsidian hexagonal tiles covered the floor, giving off a faint gleam. At the far end, a lavish armchair gazed into the hearth. Around the delicate legs of the chair, a snake lay basking in the warmth of the smoldering flames.

Bellatrix Lestrange remained a safe distance from the armchair, for in it sat one of the few individuals she had ever feared. She had every right to be frightened of him. Especially now since, it was her shortcoming that had caused Harry to be captured. After her recovery, Lestrange had instantly felt the Dark Lord's fury toward her. He avoided her at all cost. She knew she treaded a very thin line. Without Harry, her position had suddenly become much weaker.

Knowing the inevitableness, Bellatrix briskly walked to stand beside the chair. She fell into a deep bow. "My Lord."

Fingers tapped the arm, slowly with determination. They continued to do so. Bellatrix felt her legs begin to waver, as time passed drudgingly. Her face glistened with uncertainty, yet she dare not say a word.

"We received an exceptionally bizarre letter for Lucius's son very late last night." Voldemort paused. "We could not make sense from it. Do you know what that means?"

Bellatrix found her hope rising. "Harry's at Hogwarts."

"My spies have alerted me that Dumbledore has increased the security around and in the school." Voldemort's fingers grasped the arm, digging into its fabric. "The esteemed Headmaster knows."

"My Lord, how can you be certain?" Bellatrix asked cautiously, half expecting the Cruciatus Curse to be placed on her.

Voldemort turned in the chair, and Bellatrix saw his red eyes rest on her. "Harry would have been sent to Azkaban. Instead, he is kept

near to great fool.” Bellatrix heard the fluctuation in her master’s voice, as he struggled to remain composed. “My dear old professor knows my strategy. But I also know his.”

Bellatrix nodded, Dumbledore would never change. “He will seek to turn Harry to the ‘light’, and then use him as a weapon against us.”

Voldemort turned his attention back to the consuming fire before him. “He will try, however, Dumbledore does not see the full extent of Harry’s potential. He sees only a child. Dumbledore will refuse to see anything other than a child. What he cannot see is that that child died, leaving only a shell.” Voldemort rose from his chair. “I already have Malfoy and Snape working to bring Harry back. I want you to aid them. Consider this a chance to atone for your mistake.”

“Thank-you, my Lord. You are far too gracious.”

Voldemort’s hand rested on the mantle of the hearth, looking exceedingly pale against its black stone. “Bring him back to me, Bellatrix.”

“I will,” Lestrage whispered.

Voldemort listened, as his servant’s footsteps echoed hollowly throughout the chamber. He could only hope that she would bring progress, and somehow he knew she would.

---

The classroom rang with irksome voices, discussing minor details of their owners’ lives. One unruly black haired boy sat quietly in the front row, staring aimlessly. He ignored his fellows. His hands toyed with the wand that lay on his desk, trying to remember the scene that had played through his head when Potter had handed it to him. Harry frowned, when he recalled the flash of memory that he was given, as the wand was handed to him. His mind could not go further with the memory, so he brushed it aside for the time being.

The seat beside him scraped backward. Slowly, Harry turned his head to stare at the occupant of that chair. Beside him sat a round-faced boy with brown hair. Harry instantly recognized him as Neville Longbottom, and then turned away.

"Neville, if you want I can sit there." Harry recognized the voice of Ron Weasley.

"That's alright," Neville answered. "I know it would put you out."

Weasley nodded before taking a seat directly behind Harry. Granger sat reluctantly beside her friend, her eyes glancing nervously in Harry's direction. Her eyes widened when she saw that he actually held a wand. She looked about to say something, but stopped when the Professor walked in. Harry, instantly, recognized the werewolf.

Lupin moved to his desk and rested his worn briefcase on its surface. The tired-looking professor then studied the class his eyes resting perhaps longer on Harry.

"Today's class will be more of a practical nature," Lupin said. "I am sure you are aware of the increase in Voldemort's movements. Many of you have even been closely affected by the Death Eaters' raids." The professor paused. "It is my task to make sure that you are capable to defend yourself. I will have you break into pairs. Once you are broken into pairs, I want you to practice dueling. You will not start until I tell you to begin."

Lupin moved over to Harry just as Ronald Weasley challenged the somber raven-haired boy.

"Mr. Weasley, Mr. Potter will be sitting out." Lupin said casually, though his voice possessed an edge.

"My name is not Potter." Harry said, breaking his oath to remain quiet.

Before Lupin could say anything, Weasley turned on his professor. "I'm not afraid to fight him!"

Lupin winced at Ron's loud statement. His eyes shifted to see that the other students were now listening to their conversation. "Remember this is not a duel to the death." As he said this, his eyes remained firmly on Harry.

Harry gave a slight nod before following Weasley to a cleared spot.



"I don't know what was in Dumbledore's head when he gave you that!" Weasley fumed through his teeth. "I am going to make you pay."

A smirk touched Harry's lips, as his eyes assumed their obdurate look. "What makes you think you can win? The reason I am here is because of some bizarre fluke. I have never been defeated in one-on-one combat."

Weasley's eyes flashed dangerously, deepening Harry's amusement. Perhaps Harry allowed too much of his entertainment to show, because Weasley's face reddened further in rage.

"Face your partner," Lupin's voice called to his students. "BEGIN!"

"*Expelliarmus!*" Ron shouted.

Harry effortlessly dodged the spell. His smile became more pronounced. He winked at the flustered boy standing in front of him, whose face was threatening by the second to take on the shade of a radish.

"*Furnunculus!*"

Harry waved his wand, causing the curse to fall harmlessly to the side. He yawned.

"*Petrificus Totalus!*"

Once again, Harry blocked this spell. In the background, he heard Lupin calling to Ron to stop. Weasley, however, did not appear to have heard the professor.

With a flick of his wand, Harry sent Ronald Weasley flying across the room with a banishing charm.

"That is enough both of you!" Lupin shouted at the pair, as Ron shot to his feet. Lupin turned to survey the rest of the students, who were watching with shocked expressions. "Now-."

Lupin was cut off by gasps, as Ron lunged at his former partner. In a flash of movement, Harry pulled Ron's arm up behind his back, pinning the furious youth to the ground.

"MR. WEASLEY! MR. POTTER! That is enough!" Lupin's hand fastened on his wand, as he warily eyed Harry.

Harry returned the werewolf's gaze. He was tempted to retain his hold on Weasley, as means to test Lupin. In the end, however, he released his grasp on Ron and stood. He noticed that Lupin's face relaxed greatly. Weasley was instantly backing away for Harry, his eyes wide with alarm. His once flaming face was now pale, causing his freckles to stand out.

"I think that is enough for today. If you would read the first two chapters in your textbooks for next time..." As a side note he added. "Mr. Potter, you will remain after class, and Mr. Weasley I would like to talk with you later tonight."

The classroom emptied, leaving Harry alone with Lupin.

"Your wand, please, Harry." Lupin said, as he held out his hand.

Harry wordlessly handed over his wand.

"Your father should be coming soon."

"He is not my father." Harry retorted.

A sad expression draped Lupin's pale face. "My eyes tell me differently." The professor moved to sit behind his desk. "No matter how much you might deny it, you are James Potter's son, not Voldemort's."

The door swung open, and James Potter entered, surveying the room, as if he expected it to be ruined.

"Moony, it is good to see you still in one piece." James said with a lopsided grin. "It doesn't appear that you had to stun him, either."

Lupin smiled faintly. "He did, however, manage to knock some sense into Mr. Weasley... or so I hope." At James's questioning look, Remus continued. "I had them practice dueling today. I was going to have Harry sit it out for obvious reasons. However Mr. Weasley was determined to duel with him. It ended with Ronald pinned to the ground."

James eyed the quiet youth, before returning his attention to Remus. "I'll see you later. Right now Dumbledore is expecting us."

"Take care, James." Remus answered slyly. "You had better inform Albus of the incident that occurred here."

James nodded his head. "It was a bad idea to begin with."

Harry frowned at the mention of Dumbledore. Silently, he knew his meetings with the Headmaster would be draining.

Sighing, James moved nearer to Harry. "Let's get going."

They arrived to the headmaster's office with out incident. Dumbledore beamed over his desk as the two entered.

"Please, Harry, have a seat." Dumbledore then turned to James. "I want to discuss some matters with Harry privately."

James slowly nodded his head, and turned to leave. "Oh, Remus thought you should know that DADA didn't go well. Ronald Weasley can't forget what happened to his brother."

"I will talk with him."

James frowned at the man, who sat behind the desk. "Albus, you can tell Ron to let go, but it won't work. Eventually, and perhaps unintentionally, he will let something slip. Besides that point, Harry should not be in such a class with other people's children. He is far beyond their level!"

"I will think of an alternative." Dumbledore said easily.

James shook his head and left the Headmaster's office.

“Now, Harry, please sit.” Dumbledore waved toward a chair, his blue eyes twinkling. “Lemon Drop?” He asked, once Harry was finally seated.

Harry shook his head.

The Headmaster seemed slightly disappointed, but it quickly passed. “Do you know why Voldemort kidnapped you?”

Green eyes met bright blue. “To protect me from you.”

“I see.” The blue eyes peered down at him over the moon-shaped spectacles. “And why do you need protection from me?”

Harry remained still.

“Has Tom Marvolo Riddle not told you?” Dumbledore did not wait for him to reply. “Tom took you that night, Harry, not to protect you but to use you. There was a prophecy made that said that you would have the power to destroy him, Harry. That was his single reason for stealing you from your parents. He has poisoned you, so you would not defeat him.”

Harry’s eyes looked distant, as he looked out one of the many windows. “If the tables were turned, Headmaster, I doubt my life would be different.”

“We would never ask of you what Voldemort has.”

“But you already have.”

Dumbledore betrayed no emotion. “Voldemort has killed many people who did not deserve that fates they were dealt.”

“Many of those people I killed.” Harry said evenly, as he continued to look out the window. “You are being very hypocritical. You wish to give me a second chance, but yet you damn my father. My hands are just as blood-covered as his.”

“How do you use the Unforgivables, Harry?”

The youth broke his contact with the window and faced the wizard before him. "I use them well." He said smugly.

Dumbledore returned his haughty smile, causing Harry to falter with uncertainty. "To use an unforgivable curse, you have to feel hatred. I do not feel such strong emotions from you."

Harry stiffened, his lips forming a tight line. The old Headmaster took this in but said nothing. Instead he allowed the room to be eerily silent. After a few moments, the Phoenix that sat on its golden perch began to sing. The song frightened Harry, but at the same time comforted him. Without knowing why, Harry rose quickly for his chair, his eyes wandering to the closed door.

"Before you leave," Dumbledore started. "Do you have any information about the Death Eater attacks? They have increased in the past weeks."

"I worked alone."

"My door is always open."

Harry peered over his shoulder back at Dumbledore. "I have no doubts that it is." The door in front of Harry opened, and just outside he saw his gaoler waiting. Without looking at the Headmaster, he whispered. "I am not a grain of wheat."

---

By the time Harry entered the Great Hall much later that night, he found it filled. At the Gryffindor table, he saw Dorian Potter waving at him to join his small group. Ronald Weasley forcibly pulled Potter's waving hand down and looked as if he were having some heated words with him. Harry would gladly oblige Weasley just this one time, and moved to a seat as far away from the small group as possible.

"Weasel-bait! I hear you like the floor." Harry heard Draco's voice call merrily. He was certain his friend was doing an impression, as the Slytherin table was erupting in laughter.

"That is quite enough." came a woman's severe voice. "Ten points from Slytherin. I will not tolerate such behavior. Take your seat."

Harry heard her pass behind him, as she strode to the staff table. When she came in to his sight, he recognized her as Minerva McGonagall.

"You were pretty good today."

Harry looked toward a girl, who sat diagonal from him.

"During Defense class today." She smiled, which appeared to be fake to Harry. "My name is Lavender Brown, and this is my friend Parvati Patil."

Harry returned her fake smile. "It is nice to meet you."

The two girls smiled at each other, both looking overly excited. "We hear that you have been living with muggle relations?"

'So have I,' Harry thought amusedly. "Yes, I have. I am told my parents thought I would be safer there with Voldemort looking for our family." He took great pleasure when he the two girls cringe.

"Why didn't they send Dorian when he was born?"

Harry feigned a hurt expression. "By that time, Voldemort was not as active. Needless to say, they kept him and forgot about me."

A horrified expression passed between the two friends.

Patil was the first to respond. "We shouldn't have pried."

"At least you didn't turn out a prat like Dorian," Lavender said kindly.

Harry smiled, but his smile quickly vanished when the door the Hall was thrown open. A solitary man stood in the freshly created opening. The sound of a wooden leg hitting the hard floor echoed through the now silent room. Harry could not help but feel Mad-Eye Moody's magical eye on him, as the old Auror sauntered to the staff table.

The professors leaned forward as Moody conversed with the aged Headmaster. Harry noticed with interest that their faces visibly paled.

Dumbledore nodded to Professor McGonagall, who instantly rose to her feet.

“Students will follow their prefects to the dormitories. You will be dining there this evening.” The prefects exchanged nervous glances, as they stood to direct their charges. They stopped briefly so McGonagall could finish. “Miss Bones, if you would come with me.”

The sixteen year old sitting at the Hufflepuff table instantaneously froze when she heard McGonagall call her name. Her small frame trembled fiercely, as forced herself on to her feet. Susan Bones’s eyes met McGonagall’s, who was rapidly approaching her. The girl’s whole frame seemed to collapse, as she fell to the ground in tears.

Harry watched, as McGonagall helped Bones out of the Great Hall. His right hand trembled slightly. His eyes remained fixed on the place where Bones had left, though he could no longer see.

“Gryffindors follow us,” shouted Hermione Granger.

Harry broke contact with the entry and examined the Hall, which was close to hysterics as rumors flew of Death Eater attacks. These conditions were perfect. His feet began to take him into the crowd when a hand suddenly grasped his shoulder.

“Where do you think your going?” James Potter asked.

Harry flashed him a look of pure loathing, which made Potter unconsciously lower his hand to his wand. Seeing Potter’s movement, Harry quickly calmed.

“Moody wants your help.” James stated.

Gradually, Harry found himself being led to the scarred Auror. Moody gave him a look of contempt, which Harry gladly returned. Mad-Eye slammed a picture on to the staff table. He glared impassively at Harry. One of his gnarled fingers tapped the picture resoundingly.

“The work of one of your friends.” Moody’s mouth quivered, and with one swift movement he grabbed onto Harry’s neck, forcing his head

down toward the picture. "WHO DID IT?" Moody shouted, as he shook Harry.

Harry raked over the grisly image before him of two witches and then one wizard brutally slaughtered. Their corpses were unidentifiable. The murderer had been sadistic, which could make any Death Eater and even his father. The Death Eater tactics all tended to parallel each others.

"Who were they?" Harry asked calmly, wishing Moody would release his hold on his neck.

"The Bones. Amelia Bones with her brother and sister-in-law." Moody answered hostilely, his grip tightening.

Harry tensed at the pain he was beginning to feel. Forcing himself to concentrate on the picture, he ignored the death grasp of Moody. His green eyes flowed over the picture and a certainty filled the pit of his stomach. He must have allowed some of his knowing show, because Moody immediately jerked him.

"WHO?"

Harry winced at his rough handling. "My father... he has wanted the Bones dead for some time now."

Dumbledore's brow furrowed. "The War has begun again in earnest. Voldemort is moving once more."

---

Mundungus Fletcher crawled quickly away from the cloaked woman, who stood haughty behind him. His fingers dug into the ground as he desperately tried to get away.

"*Crucio!*" Her voice held a mocking tone.

"Bella- please!" Mundungus managed to say between his screams of pain.

The curse suddenly was lifted. "Fletcher, you are mangy carrion."



"I will tell you what you want to know!" The man said frantically.

Bellatrix Lestrange smiled cruelly. "Of course, you will," she whispered condescendingly. "I know you are a member of the Order. I need you to tell me the number of Aurors and Order members that are located at Hogwarts."

"Hogwarts?" Mundungus screeched. "Why would you-."

*"Crucio!"*

Screams shattered the cool air, until the spell was lifted.

The thief shook from the reminders of the pain, and gasped for air. "At the most twenty."

Bella laughed. "Hardly enough."

Fletcher eyes bulged in fear and he backed away.

"I greatly enjoyed our little 'chat', Fletcher, but now it is time that I leave."

The thief went backwards even faster. Mundungus pushed himself onto his feet and ran in the opposite direction. His breath was clearly visible in the cold air. He had to escape, even if he was forced to tell Dumbledore of his slip of tongue.

*"Avada Kedavra!"* Mundungus fell to the hard earth.

Lestrange walked up to the corpse. Her dark eyes remained impassive. Before she apparated, she whispered. "I am sorry I did not have time to play."

## Thestrals

Inhaling deeply, the smell of breakfast tantalized Harry's nose, as he lay in his bed. The sun hit his face, as he stretched his arms above his head. His muscles felt tight. Groaning, Harry pushed back the warm covers and started his morning routine. Pulling on his despised school robes, he then preceded to brush his hair, which proved to be a useless endeavor. With one brief look into a mirror, he left the bedroom.

By the time he made it to the living area, Harry found the table laden with food. James Potter was already seated and silently eating. His eyes rose from his plate when he noticed Harry watching him.

"I thought I would have a house elf bring breakfast here." Potter stated casually, as he lifted a teacup to his lips.

Harry nodded, feeling somewhat grateful. He pulled back a chair and sat. Grabbing a plate, Harry filled his plate. The pair remained quiet. The only sound was their silverware hitting the plates.

James broke the silence first. "Looking forward to Care of Magical Creatures?"

Harry paused, his piece of toast suspended in midair. "Not especially." Harry lowered the piece of toast back to the plate. "Just another distraction provided by Dumbledore."

James laid his fork beside his plate, before leaning back in his chair. "Harry, try to prevent another incident."

"What I did was in self-defense."

"I know it was, but you could have easily avoided the confrontation."

"Weasley, then, would not understand that is in his best interests to leave me alone."

"You can not afford to teach 'lessons'."

"Why do you care?"

James shrugged his shoulders.

Harry frowned, but chose to not press further.

After a time, James rose from his chair. "Ready?"

Harry nodded, pushing his plate away. "Let's get this over."

As the two walked through the corridors, Harry noticed an extremely pale first year Slytherin boy watching him apprehensively. His frame was shaking, though his face seemed to reflect that he had come to a decision. With his eyes partially closed, the first year barreled toward Harry. Tilting his head in astonishment, Harry did not react quick enough, and the two collided. The first year's books and parchment scattered across the floor along with Harry's.

"I'm so sorry." The boy stammered, as he hurried himself collecting his things. He was too terrified to even look at Harry. "I was running late to Herbology... I'm so sorry." The boy, having collected his items, turned to Harry and extended his hand.

Harry frowned, but still grasped the boy's hand. After a brief shake, the boy quickly released and ran down the hall at breakneck speed. It was after the boy had vanished from sight that Harry realized that he had a piece of parchment pressed into his hand. Harry bent down, and picked up his Care for Magical book. He stuffed the note in between the pages, being careful not to draw James's attention. His guard was too busy helping pick up Harry's parchment to notice.

"That was odd." James stated, as he causally handed Harry his papers.

Harry shrugged. "Most of the people here are."

Potter looked briefly at Harry for a moment, suspicion evident in his eyes. In the end, he said nothing and continued to lead Harry out of the castle. Harry blinked his eyes at the harsh sunlight. It seemed so long since he had seen the sun, and he was enjoying every moment of its warmth. Across the lawn, Harry saw students walking to what appeared to be a hut. His thoughts were later confirmed by James.

“That is Hagrid’s home. He holds the lessons there.”

Harry nodded. “I think I can manage it from here.” He continued, when James seemed about ready to disagree. “I am not stupid enough to run. I am certain there are plenty of Aurors lurking around. Wandless, I would not have a chance.”

James nodded and allowed Harry to proceed to the gathering.

Among the students, Harry recognized Weasley, Granger, and Longbottom. He noticed how Granger’s face paled, while Weasley’s face took a livid red color. Longbottom appeared to not even notice him, and Harry planned to keep it that way. As he approached the croup of students, Weasley grabbed Granger’s arm and pulled her until they were a good distance away from him.

A gap separated the Gryffindor group from the Slytherins. Harry did not have to look at that Slytherin group to know that Draco would not be there. He had heard his friend’s Hippogriff story enough to know that the young Malfoy would drop the class at the soonest opportunity.

Unexpectedly, a huge ominous figure came into the midst of the student, carrying half a dead cow with him. To Harry’s horror, he realized that this had to be the instructor. Draco had described him enough for Harry to immediately recognize him without difficulty.

Hagrid jerked his head toward the forest. “We’re workin’ in here today!” His face stretched into a happy smile. Hagrid seemed to be brimming with excite, which only made Harry nervous. According to Draco, this Hagrid did not have the same sense most normal people had. “Ready? Right, I’ve bin planin’ this trip inter the forest fer quite some time now. Thought we’d see these creatures in their natural habitat. What we’re studyin’ today is pretty rare, I reckon I’m probably the on’y person in Britian who’s managed ter train ‘em.”

This last part did not settle Harry’s nerves in the slightest. He shrewdly noted that the other students were just as edgy. For ten minutes, Hagrid lead his class deeper into the forest, until they reached a place where the trees stood so close together that it appeared to be almost night.

Hagrid placed the cow on to the ground, and then call, "Gather roun'! They'll be attracted by the smell o' the meat."

"Hagrid, this creature doesn't eat people does it?" Ron asked.

To this question, Hagrid looked extremely insulted. He turned to look amongst the trees. A few minutes passed before a smile crossed Hagrid's craggy face. "Ah, 'ere they come!"

Harry's breath seemed to catch in his throat when he saw a sleek black horse with gleaming white eyes come into his line of vision. The horse looked little more then a skeleton with wings. It eyed the class before turning its attention turned to the dead cow, its fangs ripping into the flesh. This had not been the first time Harry had seem the winged horse. He had wished that day so long ago that he would not see another, but today had ruined this wish.

"Why doesn't Hagrid call again?" Weasley whispered loudly to Granger.

Harry surveyed the class and noticed that besides himself only two others seemed to see the beasts. One of them was a stringy Slytherin boy, who watched the horse with disgust. Neville Longbottom, the second, seemed interested in the swishing movement of the horse's tail.

Movement returned Harry's eyes back to the forest, and he watched as another came out of the forest into view. This horse seemed to look directly at him, before joining its fellow in eating the carcass of the cow.

"Here comes another one!" Hagrid said gleefully.

"Hagrid, what are we suppose to see?" Hermione asked inquisitively.

"Thestrals," Harry whispered loud enough for most of the class to hear.

For the first time Hagrid seemed to fully see him. The professor's face displayed a wide variety of emotions most of which Harry could not distinguish. "That's right. I ain't surprised that you'd be able to see

‘em.” Hagrid said briefly. “The only people who can see thestrals are people who have seen death.”

Harry tuned out Hagrid’s booming voice and instead turned his attention to a third thestral, who was just approaching. This one’s attention, however, did not go to the cow but remained focused on Harry. A sinking feeling entered Harry’s gut, as the creature slowly approached him. The muscles in his legs tighten in anticipation. He was not the only one to notice the thestral’s approach.

“Hagrid,” Longbottom called to the Professor.

Hagrid turned to where the horse creature moved steadily toward Harry. “‘Arry, be careful. Don’t make any ‘asty moves.”

Harry did not need his advice in that matter. Standing perfectly still, he just looked intently into the creature’s white eyes. Slowly, he lifted his arm and gently stroked the craven creature’s cheek. He heard the students’ gasps in the background of his mind, but quickly canceled them. As he stroked the horse, memories began to swarm before his eyes. His hand froze, resting on the thestral’s cheek, as the dreams played out in partial fullness. He could see the long hallway reflected in the thestral’s lustrous eyes.

*The door was opened and emitted light into the closed confines of the hallway. His legs carried him forth. The room came into view its decorated walls, displaying various paintings and some wizarding family photos. One painting in particular caught his interest, as he traveled on. It was a pastoral scene... the very opposite of what would occur here this very night. Harry’s youthful mind desperately wished he could disappear into its canvassed world. But his legs would not allow him to do so.*

*The two people now turned to look at him. Some emotion seemed to flicker in their eyes, but Harry did not understand...*

His hand jerked away from the creature, breaking off the memory. Harry did a quick back step. The thestral turned and trotted toward the cow, his interest in Harry satisfied.

“Are you alright, ‘Arry?” Hagrid asked concern evident in his voice.

Harry knew his face had to be pale. "Fine." He said shortly.

"Well," Hagrid began, eyeing Harry skeptically. "That ends our class for today." With those words, the burly Professor led his class from the recesses of the forest.

Once back in the open, the students immediately relaxed. Harry though was not surprised to be greeted by James. Once the others were out of hearing, James turned to Harry.

"You have an appointment with Dumbledore."

"That wasn't apart of today's agenda." Harry replied coldly. He did not need another brain-picking courtesy of the revered Hogwart's Headmaster. Dread filled Harry. "What does he want?"

James just shrugged.

Certainty filled Harry. The Aurors, who had followed him into the forest, had reported his interesting encounter with the thestral. He could only imagine what his expressions might have been, as he took his little walk down memory lane.

"I'm sure it will be short." Harry said with a clipped tone.

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Dumbledore gazed serenely over the rims of his glasses "Is there anything you want to tell me, Harry."

"And around we go again." Harry said with a smile on his face.

"I am told you had a bizarre reaction to Hogwart's thestrals."

"They are creatures that relish death. Even so they are quite fascinating."

The aged Headmaster smiled. "You are quite a clever boy, Harry. Tom was too. You both use red herrings to move the attention away from what you do not others to see."

"I think we are done here."

“There will come a day, Harry, when we can not hide from the things we have done.” Dumbledore said quietly. “We do not need to be reminded by others of our deeds. They have a way of cropping up within us on their own. I expect you already know this. I want you to know that I am always available to listen to you.”

During that last part of Dumbledore’s speech, Harry could feel a tug in his mind. He soundly barred the Headmaster’s entry.

“That will be all, Harry. Enjoy the rest of your evening. We will be expecting you at dinner tonight in the Grand Hall.”

“I can think of nothing better.”

When Harry finally returned to his quarters, he collapsed on to his bed. Every meeting with the Headmaster left him exhausted. No matter how many times he was barred entry, Dumbledore never gave up on his endeavor to enter Harry’s mind. Harry would be the first to admit that his Occlumency skills were lacking and took a lot of energy to maintain. ‘One day he will find a way in,’ Harry thought. ‘It’s amazing it wasn’t today.’ His lapse with the thestrals had left his shields weakened.

His hand dropped to the floor and blindly grasped his Care for Magical Creatures textbook. He glanced toward the door and was satisfied that James was not coming in. He flipped through the pages until he came to the note the frightened first year had pressed into his hand. Inquisitive, Harry quickly unfolded the piece of paper and read the words written upon it. He instantly recognized the hand writing, as Draco’s.

‘Meet me at the library this coming Monday just after lunch.

I know it will be challenging, but I know you will come up with something.

I will be in the Charms section... you should find the potions section interesting.

-A Friend’



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Snape glared at the Headmaster. "Absolutely not!"

"Severus-."

"I will not have the child that the Dark Lord considers to be his in my classroom. It is absolutely out of the question."

Dumbledore sighed in annoyance. "I see no harm-."

"This 'thing' already hates me and suspects me of being traitor. It will not do to have him anywhere near my person." Snape hissed sharply. "It puts my position for you in unnecessary danger."

"Severus, I highly doubt that."

"Headmaster," Severus said shortly. "You are greatly misled if you think that he will come over to you."

"I have an idea, which was somewhat confirmed today." Dumbledore shuffled through some papers that were shattered across his desk. "It will be some time yet before I implement my plan."

"Be wary."

Dumbledore nodded his head. "Please, consider allowing him into your classroom."

Snape frowned. "It will be considered. I will tell you of my decision by this morning, in time for the class."

"Thank-you, Severus."

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"So this is your plan, Bella?" Voldemort asked attentively. "You would have me attack Hogwarts?"

Bellatrix Lestrange smiled in a way only she could do. "Not exactly in that sense. It will be a small operation with some inside help."

Voldemort eyed the woman next to him. "And where is this inside help coming from?"

“Draco Malfoy is aiding us in this endeavor.”

Voldemort snorted. “That boy is incompetent! He will be the weak spot of this plan.”

“You underestimate the boy. He is completely loyal to both you and Harry. Harry also trusts him, which is an added bonus.” Bellatrix paused. “It will work, though it might be a few months before we can act.”

The Dark Lord turned away from Lestrage. “Time is the one thing that we are lacking. We are nearing to the end, Bellatrix, I can feel it in my blood. The deciding factor will be Harry. That is why he must be back in my hands.”

“I promise you that he will be.”

“Until then, Bella, we have places to be. You continue with your plans. As for me, without Harry, I have been forced to take certain matters into my own hands.”

“Something reminiscent of the Bones, my Lord?” A gleam showed in Bellatrix’s eyes.

The Dark Lord’s laughter spread through the hall. The flash in his eyes made Bellatrix straighten.

“Dear Bellatrix, what I have planned is greater than what I did to the Bones. It is even greater than an attack on Hogwarts.” Voldemort paused. “The Wizarding World is going to tremble.”

### Chapter Thirteen: Engulfing Flames

A cauldron was placed roughly on the desk in front of Harry. The sound echoed throughout the sparse and quiet room. Harry winced slightly at the harsh noise. The pale Professor before Harry assessed him with narrowed eyes. Harry met his gaze. Their silent battle of wills lasted only a few minutes before Snape broke it off.

“See that you do not destroy my classroom with this cauldron, Mr. *Potter*.” Snape whispered snidely.

Harry looked around the room. His eyes flickered briefly. “I would not dream of destroying such a well decorated achievement!”

Laughter filled the room when the other students heard this. Even the Slytherin side joined in. Harry felt pleased at this response, though he was not entirely sure why. Harry grinned and shrugged his shoulders at Snape.

“Remember, it is only by courtesy that you are here.” Snape whispered, so only Harry could hear. “Dumbledore would not hesitate to send you, let’s say, out to the coast, if you catch my drift.”

Just as equally quiet, Harry replied. “The old man is blind. He won’t send me away.”

Snape leaned closer, causing Harry to feel physically repulsed. “Do you really want to see?”

Harry leaned away from the greasy man, and smiled slightly. “I believe you have a class to teach, Professor.”

“Thank-you for your permission.” Snape voiced loudly. He could already see the students’ curious faces, as they silently wondered how Harry had managed to insult him without receiving punishment. “Mr. Potter, I do believe we will be discussing your behavior with the Headmaster.”

“I look forward to speaking with the delightful old man.” Harry stated pleasantly, though his eyes revealed another sentiment.

On the other side of the room, Draco Malfoy was laughing uncontrollable. "You're too kind *Potter*. He's ancient."

"Malfoy," Snape shouted. "You will be in detention with me every Wednesday... for six weeks."

Malfoy paled. "Professor!"

"This is not for debate." Snape said forcibly, as he walked to his desk. "Now, Potter, you will be paired with Granger-."

"Prof-." Ron Weasley started

Snape angrily slammed his hands on to the red-head's desk. "Weasley, do not tempt me, or you will be in detention until you graduate!"

Weasley's face paled, along with the majority of the classes'. They had never seen Snape in such a wrath, as he was in this particular moment. Gradually, Snape regained much of his composure. Eying the class with contempt, he pointed at the chalkboard behind him.

"There is today's potion. It is a rather simple Befuddlement Draught. You should not be able mess it up." He paused. "The potion is not going to make itself!"

The students scrambled to start preparations for the potion. The bushy haired Granger moved to take a place at his desk. Her eyes refused to look at him, instead opting to stare at the cauldron. Harry sighed loudly, as he stared at the instructions written on the board. His eyes then shifted to his partner.

"We can make this painless." He said casually, as he placed the first ingredient into the cauldron.

Hermione looked up at him. "I agree. We will just make the potion and only speak when necessary."

Harry nodded. "And doing thus, we will survive." Harry noticed Ron, who was looking furtively at them. "And your boyfriend will also be

happy. Especially when he sees you are unharmed and remained a loyal follower of the 'light'."

"He needs to learn to trust me." Hermione said quietly, refusing to even acknowledge Ron's looks of concern. "I can take care of myself."

"So you can." Harry stated. "Draco has told me about you... mostly about how a deranged woman in third year almost killed him."

Hermione blushed. "I didn't even hit him that hard."

Harry suppressed his laughter. "To hear him tell it, he was almost beaten to an inch of his life."

"Sounds like Draco. That same year, he claimed a Hippogriff almost killed him when he only received a scratch."

He smiled fondly at this, peering over at his friend. "That is Draco for you."

Hermione's brow creased. "You are different than I thought you would be."

"What is different?"

"I guess I expected you to be more like Malfoy."

"My father would never allow that." Harry dropped another ingredient into the potion. "He does not approve of all of Draco's traits. But he was suitable as a playmate."

"It must have been an interesting childhood, besides the outings." Hermione said pointedly, when she reached the last part of her sentence. "I can not comprehend doing the things that you have done. And you act as if you were almost normal."

"I don't think it is supposed to be turning this shade of orange." Harry said suddenly, removing the focus off himself.

Hermione muttered something under her breath, and began to immediately remedy the situation. Her actions were just in time, as Snape came immediately over to their table. Harry smiled at the disappointment he read on Snape's face, as the potion was quickly corrected by Granger. The unhygienic Professor sulked back to his desk from where he continued to glare at their table.

'He still thinks I want to wreck his damp dungeon,' Harry thought, as he gave a slight wave in Snape's direction, causing the Professor's face to turn a deeper shade of scarlet. 'When I return home, there is going to be some changes. His act is too good.'

Over to the Slytherin side, Harry saw that Draco was amusing himself at his partner, Neville Longbottom's, expense. Their potion suddenly began to spew over their table, utterly destroying it. Snape, who was already in a sour mood, after fixing the mess, began to chew out the round faced boy, rather than Draco.

"Everyone back to work!" Snape shouted after he had thoroughly chewed out Longbottom.

Harry did not need to be told twice. He knew that he had pushed the potion Professor perhaps a little too hard. 'If he is not loyal to my father, he would have no qualms in poisoning me,' he thought quietly. With that last thought, he returned his attention to Granger, who was finishing off their potion.

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The Headmaster startled slightly when the fire in his hearth changed to a sudden green hue. Dumbledore rose from his seat and waited, until a person appeared within the green flames. Out stepped Alastor Moody, his face set in a grim fashion. His clothes were in a state of disarray.

"Albus, we have a situation." Moody said between deep gasps. "Voldemort is in London. He's striking Diagon Alley, as we speak. He's moving toward the Ministry of Magic."

Dumbledore's eyes widened. "Go ahead of me. I will be along shortly with a few of the aurors' sent to guard Harry."

"Is that wise?" Mad-eye asked doubtfully.

"Tom is the greater threat at the moment." Dumbledore said briskly, as he glided to his studies door. "We do not have time to wait, Alastor."

Moody curtly nodded his head. "After this, there is no hiding the fact we exist from the Muggles. They can see the flames just as clearly as we can."

Dumbledore paused and looked back at his old friend. "Secrets do not last forever. It was inevitably that one day would come when we could not hide our existence from them. That day is today. One can never say, but it just might be that we will need Muggles to win this war. Afterwards, we will pick up the pieces."

Secretly, Mad-eye wondered what Muggles could possibly do to aid in the fight against the Dark Lord. He did not express his question orally. Instead, he returned to the fireplace and muttered "Ministry of Magic" before disappearing into the green flames.

Dumbledore did not even wait to see Moody away. He had more important matters to attend to. First, he would pay a quick visit to James Potter, who had to remain, before gathering the necessary Aurors for the stand against Voldemort. He would catch James just before Harry's potion class let out. He was not disappointed to find James waiting patiently by the door to the classroom.

"James, I need you to keep an extra careful watch on Harry." Dumbledore gazed at the door that Harry was beyond. "Voldemort is attacking London. I have thoughts that this move may a diversion for recapturing Harry. Be extra wary, especially since I will be taking some of the Aurors posted to Harry with me. It is the perfect ruse for Voldemort to act."

"I can help-." James began stubbornly.

"It is far more important that you remain with Harry. If you were to suddenly disappear, he would know something was happening." Dumbledore sighed. "We do not need him acting against us, especially at the same time as Voldemort."

James's eyes still bespoke of stubbornness. "I will stay. Just let me know if you need my help."

"I will inform you immediately." Dumbledore turned, as he said this and with a slight pause he left the other man to his thoughts.

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Harry was grateful that potions was finally over. Once outside the classroom, he was greeted by James, and together they began to walk to Harry's next class. Divinations, a subject, that Harry personally despised as it had made his life hell. On the way, he astutely noticed a change in James's normal behavior. 'Something is off.' Harry thought. Images flashed before his mind as he guessed at the possible reasons.

"Your behavior is different." Harry finally stated. Curiosity had won out on his need to distance himself from this man.

James looked at Harry out of the corner of his eyes. "Why would you think that?"

"You are agitated." Harry stated with an eerie calm. "What is happening?"

"Nothing." James answered shortly, effectively closing the conversation.

They continued to the divination tower in silence. Harry continued to try to read the emotions of the older man. Along the way, Harry also noted that his usually amount of Auror escorts were drastically diminished.

"My father is busy."

James turned his head toward Harry. "The stairs lead up to the classroom. I will see you afterwards."

Harry smiled. "I hit the mark. It must be immense since Dumbledore has removed so many of my guards."

"I will see you later." James said, dodging Harry's statement entirely.



Without another choice, Harry ascended the circular stairs. Once in the room, he was hit by the strong aroma of incense and other spices. His mind became numbed to the point of being in a sleeplike trance. He took a seat at a small round table that was in the far back of the classroom. The amount of students was smaller than his other classes, and he guessed that others found the art of Divination to be a full of rubbish too.

"One person cannot save the world." Harry whispered, so quietly that he was sure no one would hear. "If the people can't stand for themselves, they deserve whatever fate they are handed."

To his left, Harry heard a rustling. Dramatically, the professor made her appearance. Her eyes were magnified by her rather large glasses, while her crazy hair framed her face. Everything about her was comical.

"Oh, my dears, how pleasant to see you all in the-." Professor Trelawney ended the sentence with a high-pitched scream.

Lavender Brown, the girl that Harry had set beside once during dinner, sat straighter and excitement etched her face. "What did you see?"

"I see a half goat, half god. On the Tarot cards this creature is known as the devil." She said, her eyes fixed on Harry.

Lavender and Parvati's mouths dropped at this exclamation. Excitedly, they turned to each other and began to whisper at a frantic pace. Before Parvati asked, "What does the devil mean, Professor?"

"The devil, my dear, is a creature of great power. He represents enslavement to less than moral desires." Trelawney waited for suspense. "It is considered by some to be the worst Tarot card to draw, even worse than the Death."

'You picked the wrong card for me,' Harry thought silently. 'Death is more suiting. Death's tale to the Fool will come true.'

Trelawney's voice continued. "Unfortunately, today my inner eye sees us working with our crystal balls, and not the cards. If you would come and each take crystal ball then return to your seats. Rather

then working pairs, we have enough room to work individually. On a sheet of paper, you will record what you see as you gaze.”

Harry rose and took a crystal ball then return instantly to his seat. He had no desire to talk with the Loon that had created a prophecy concerning himself. Once seated, he found himself staring moodily into the crystal ball. All he could see was swirling puffs of smoke fixed in a continuous dance. His thoughts strayed to his father. Silently, he whispered a slight prayer to no god in particular for his father’s safety.

‘He can’t die, why are you concerned.’ He thought to himself.

Harry jumped when the smoke suddenly cleared in his crystal ball. He instantly recognized the location as Diagon Alley, though it had changed from the last time he had seen it. The buildings were ablaze, creating the inferno of hell. He could feel the heat as it hit his unprotected face. Before him, Death Eaters and Aurors cut each other down. The air reeked with the familiar smell of blood and burning human flesh. Even Harry gagged at the odor. The streets and sidewalks were stained with blood.

Ghastly screams filled this hell. He could hear the screams of the innocents mixed with those of the aggressors. Untransformed werewolves attacked everything in their sights as if they were in their wolfish forms. Harry’s stomach turned as he watched a little girl come racing from a burning building. She looked with horror at the carnage that greeted her small eyes. She stood transfixed. A werewolf, Harry knew as Fenrir Greyback, raced toward her. In that last moment, before the two collided, her blue eyes met Harry’s. Her mouth moved, mouthing the words ‘help me.’

Harry could not stop the eminent impact. His eyes closed tightly, as the little girl transformed in his mind into another person he had once know.

*“Harry, why can’t we be friends anymore?” She had asked him quietly. Her blue eyes expressed her hurt at his sudden rejection. Her six year old mind could not fathom his reasons, which had been illusive.*

*“I’m going away.” He had answered. ‘You’re a muggle,’ he answered in his mind. Though he was her age, he seemed to tower over her.*

That next day he had moved to eliminate his target, a young woman who came from muggle parent. He did even know her name. He had never made a point in asking for his targets' names. And as he fled that mudblood's house, his friend had been there. He remembered how her eyes had changed when she saw his blood drenched dagger. No six year old was ever meant to see this.

*"Harry, what did you do to Miss Philips?" Her voice quivered.*

*"Go home."*

*"What did you do to her?" Tears moistened her cheeks. "She was always so nice to everyone. What did she do to you?" Her voice had risen to the shrill pitch of an upset child.*

*'What do I do?' Harry thought desperately. He did not know the oblivate charm yet. His father's words suddenly echoed through his mind, giving him advice, though it was not what he had wanted to hear. 'Kill her.'*

*"I'm sorry, Lucy" He whispered, moving quickly. She did not have time to react, nor could her small untrained body compete with his highly trained muscles. He felt her body go limp in his arms. Her blood coated his hands and robes, as he held her. Slowly, he laid her small framed body to the paved ground. Her braided pig tails stuck diagonally out from under her still head, absorbing their owner's blood, turning her blonde hair an unusual shade of violet.*

*"I'm sorry." He repeated, before he turned away.*

Harry jerked his gaze away from the crystal ball, his hot breath causing its surface to cloud. The students stared eagerly, however Trelawney was not about to give Harry the spotlight. Instead, she ordered all the students back to their gazing, completely ignoring Harry's shaking frame and pale complexion.

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Voldemort surveyed the scorched buildings that marked the remnants of Diagon Alley. He felt a distinct pleasure as he took in the damage he had inflicted. However, he had not yet reached his ultimate goal of Ministry of Magic. The infrastructure of the magically world was going

to crumble before his power. He waved his wand triumphantly, snapping an Auror in half as if he had been a twig. His blood splattered across Voldemort's face, but the Dark Lord made no move to remove it.

He called out to his Death Eaters. "There is our goal, my comrades. Destroy it and its occupants. Once it is gone no one can stand in our way. The world will be ours. Ours will be the rule that will last more than 100 years. Order will be restored to a Wizarding world that has long been tainted by half-breeds and mudbloods. This is our day." His voice echoed across the battlefield that London now was. "Onward my Death Eaters!"

With their force of dementors, untransformed werewolves, and giants, the Death Eaters broke through the line of Aurors, common wizards, and even muggle policemen. Voldemort flung a line of the pathetic defenders backwards. Their bodies hit the exterior of the Ministry, making a sick snapping noise as their backs shattered from the force of their impact.

Ahead of him Voldemort noticed the unmistakable form of Albus Dumbledore, his former Transfiguration teacher. Through his lips, mirthless laughter seeped.

"You have come. I'm surprised you left Hogwarts."

"You will not win here, Tom."

Voldemort's red eyes flared. "That name belonged to a weak buffoon. I have ascended to a level of higher understanding than when I was him, as a student at Hogwarts." Next Voldemort surveyed the land that surrounded him. "Look around, Dumbledore! I have already won, even if I do not take the Ministry today."

Dumbledore just shook his head in remorse. "I will raze other Wizarding communities just as I have done here. Britain will burn!"

"After this, Tom, the people will unite and stand against you. You have only made matters worse for you." Dumbledore stated calmly.

“Unite? They fear me!” Voldemort smirked. “They depend on a chosen one to defend them when they should be defending themselves. If only they could see who was marked by me. How would their hopes be then?”

“I will pull Harry back from the abyss that you have led him too!”

“No,” Voldemort murmured. “You will never achieve that. Despite the tasks, I have asked him to complete he has always remained loyal. Very much like a dog, I suppose if our roles had been reversed, Dumbledore, he would have been just as loyal to you. Except you would never have treated him like an equal.”

“You have treated him as a tool!”

Voldemort laughed. “When we stand before the gates of hell before the book that tells our lives’ stories, we shall see then, Dumbledore, how I have treated Harry. Not a moment before. This play still has yet to come to its conclusion.”

Dumbledore raised his wand at the same moment Voldemort raised his. The two eyed each other with contempt. The two circled each other like ravenous wolves, waiting for the other to show weakness.

“The old world dies here with you, old man.” Voldemort hissed, as he sent a shot of green light at Dumbledore.

Dumbledore with remarkable grace dodged the dark lord’s curse. “You have to do better than that, Tom.”

“That was barely a glimpse of what is to come.” Voldemort paused briefly, to conjure up his shield. “I wouldn’t want to kill you right away. First, I want to make you suffer.”

“You have not changed all that much, Tom. You still delight in the torturing of others.” Dumbledore stated, after effortlessly blocking a blue curse.

Voldemort made no retort to the Headmaster’s accusations. Instead, he sent a cutting jinx that Dumbledore did not block in time. The curse glanced the Headmaster’s temple and continued into his scalp.

Voldemort watched with pleasure, as his old teacher whipped the blood from his eye. Turning slightly, Voldemort gazed at the battlefield. He knew that they would not be able to take the Ministry this day, but they had left an image that would not soon be forgotten.

Voldemort smiled slightly, before turning his attention back to Dumbledore. "You see that man there, barely more than a child. It is sad really that people like him are the ones who die, not leaders of the conflicts that destroy them. Pity really." Voldemort muttered the curse so the old man could hear, and then he watch as his blast of red light hit the red haired man with the glasses square in the head.

The glasses were flung from his face, somersaulting in the air, until they landed feet away from their wearer. The glasses' owner himself fell the opposite direction of his glasses with great power.

"Pity," Voldemort hissed one final time. "He was a pureblood too. A Weasley, I believe. Tsk-tsk."

Dumbledore's eyes flared, as he forced himself to steady.

"The day is yours, Dumbledore, because I choose to give it to you. Take care of the corpses and the rubble." Voldemort paused. "And take care of my son."

"He has been seeing images of a long hallway." Dumbledore gauged Riddle's reaction, and was not disappointed when his enemy's suddenly widened before they narrowed once more. "I tend to follow that hallway to its end."

Voldemort raised his wand, tempted to end the Headmaster's life now. "You will find nothing down that hallway." With those words, he and his followers abandoned the remains of Britain's Wizarding headquarters.

"Farewell, Tom." Dumbledore muttered, as he stared at the destruction that surrounded him long after Riddle had apparated.

## Chapter Fourteen: In the Rows of Truth

News filtered into the school the Saturday after Voldemort's attack on London in the manner of terrified letters sent by concerned family members of certain students. Many others watched eagerly for the *Daily Prophets* to arrive, but they never would. The *Daily Prophet* had been destroyed that day with a good section of London, as Voldemort rampaged to reach the Ministry of Magic. The students were forced to accept Quibblers to find news of Voldemort's attack. Many others watched in fear as McGonagall began to call names of students that should follow her. Occasionally, students would burst with tears when their names were called. When the Weasleys were called, they remained silent, though Ron's head swiveled until his eyes locked on Harry. Harry instantly saw the threat underlying the death stare.

'He will be coming back.' Harry knew this with certainty.

Harry turned his attention to the Headmaster, who had been eyeing him since his return earlier that morning, and he suddenly felt unsure. The way the aged man looked at him was not normal. The hair on his arm rose on end as he met Dumbledore's icy blue eyes. Harry's mind felt a brief tingle, and he quickly tightened his walls before looking away.

'Bastard,' Harry angrily stormed.

His head jerked to the door of the Great Hall where Ronald Weasley now stood trembling. Behind him, Harry heard Dumbledore rise from his seat at the head table. However, the Headmaster did not react fully, until Ron stood directly in front of Harry and removed his wand.

"My brother is dead." Weasley stated acidly. "He's dead!"

Harry's blank expression only seemed to infuriate Ron further.

"Die, bastard!" The grieving boy shouted, filling the Great Hall which had suddenly become unnaturally silent.

Harry stared idly at the tip of the redhead's wand, which was directed at his face. "Do it." He whispered. "Fall to my level."

"You, bastard!" Tears of rage streaked down Weasley's face, as his wand hand shook with turmoil.

"Mr. Weasley," Dumbledore said calmly. "Harry did not kill Percy."

"His 'father' did!" Ron yelled. "Voldemort is his father, and he killed my brother! This piece of shit would have done it, if he had been there."

Dumbledore calmly sought to pacify the adolescent. "You cannot know that, Ronald."

Ron shook his head in fury.

"People die, Weasley." Harry murmured. "You can't bring them back. Your brother is dead. He is beyond your grasp. Feel more sympathy for yourself, you're still alive. The living should envy the dead."

Weasley's face turned a bright scarlet, and his lips began to move to say the words. However, his wand suddenly flew from his hand. He looked startled as he peered at James Potter, who now held his wand. Potter also had his own wand trained on Ron. Ron's face suddenly expressed his confusion.

"Why?" He questioned hysterically. "He deserves to die! How many people has he killed?"

To the astonishment of all, who were watching, Harry walked toward Ron. James's wand changed targets, coming to rest on the black-haired adolescent. Harry stopped when his face was directly in front of Ron's. Quietly, he leaned forward so Ron would be the only one capable of hearing his words.

"You didn't hear," Harry began in a mere whisper. "I envy the dead. No memories, no dreams, just pure nothingness." With those words, he walked out of the hall, leaving everyone in a state of shock.

Dumbledore turned toward James. "I want you to bring him to me tomorrow, James. We have to end this."



James slowly nodded his head, though he suddenly had reservations. "I'll bring him."

Dumbledore then surveyed the startled students, who were staring at him for guidance after Ronald's outburst. "All is well." He said loudly. "Mr. Weasley is distraught at the loss of his brother. Now, Mr. Weasley, I think we should take you to your family." Then to James, Dumbledore said, "Find Harry, and take him outside until the students calm down."

---

Harry sat besides James Potter, as he, Remus Lupin, and Sirius Black idly talk. The three would occasionally stop and watch as Dorian Potter flew his broom through what tricks he knew. The sun was out, along with a slight breeze, making the afternoon very pleasant.

"Can you really blame Ron?" Sirius said loudly. "His brother's head was mutilated beyond recognition by that blast! If we hadn't seen Percy get hit by that curse, there is no way we would have been able to identify him."

"Sirius-." The werewolf began before Harry toned out the group's conversation.

Instead, Harry took to ignoring their conversation and just watched silently with great interest as his biological brother pulled off an impressive dive. His curiosity must have shown, because James Potter seemed to see it.

"Do you fly?"

Harry kept his face neutral. "No."

*Draco handed him the broom to try. It was a new Nimbus Two Thousand and One. At twelve years of age, Harry had always dreamed of this moment. Last year should have been his first, but father was always putting it off and with all Harry's missions there just had not been time.*

*A giddy smile filled his youthful face, as he climbed on to the broom. His eyes widened when he saw his father's gaunt hands suddenly grasp the wooden handle. He raised them from the hands to his father's face, and took in his father's disapproval.*

*"Why can't I fly a broom?" He asked with innocence. He just could not understand why he had to wait, while Draco did not.*

*"You could get hurt." His father had replied. "I need you, Harry... besides I do not want you to be harm."*

"Why?" James asked in his usual casual manner.

"He doesn't want me to be hurt."

Sirius snorted at this. "So instead he gives you a wand, a few daggers, and an arsenal of spells, telling to go kill people. Like your not going to get hurt doing that."

"Sirius," Lupin hissed, warning his friend.

"Moony-." Sirius began.

"Do you want to fly?" James asked.

Lupin and Black's mouths dropped, while Harry's eyes widened.

"Are you insane?" Black gasped.

James frowned at his friend. "He can't leave the ground even on a broomstick. Everything will be fine, Padfoot." James rose and began to direct Harry to the pitch. Dorian landed when he saw them.

He smiled, as he hopped off his broomstick. "What do you think?"

"Slytherin doesn't stand a chance." James said fondly as he beamed at his son.

Harry's head tilted to the side. 'This is what my life might have been.' Harry thought with little emotion. 'No, this was never meant to be my life.'

“Harry’s going to give it a try.” James stated. “He’s never flown before.”

Dorian smiled widely at this. “It’s easy! You’re a Potter, I’m sure you’ll just take to it.” Without hesitation, Dorian held his new Firebolt out for Harry to take.

“Are you sure?” Harry asked quietly. Now that he had his first chance, he did not want it. He had always pictured his father being there.

“Take it.” Dorian said, giving Harry a friendly pat on the shoulder.

Hesitating slightly, Harry got on the broom. “What now?”

“Just kick up and fly.” Dorian stated. “Oh, and don’t run into anything.”

Harry’s face furrowed into deep concentration, as he kicked his feet off the ground. Immediately, he found himself soaring into the air. A glee that he had never felt before filled his body. He felt as if he might burst. Harry pushed the broom through its paces until he found the perfect speed. Once he had reached that velocity, he put the broom into a roll that took his breath away. Below him, the group looked so small. The scenery was also so much different. It was beautiful. He stored it into his memory, wanting to cherish forever. He knew that he would not get to ride anytime soon, especially when he returned to his father.

Gradually, he felt that he should return to the earth. As soon as his feet touched the ground, he was surrounded by the small group. Harry was taken aback by their looks of astonishment. At first he thought, it was because of his flying abilities, until he realized why they were looking at him oddly. He was smiling.

With realization, he quickly deadened his face, resuming his normal unfeeling facial expression. Seeing his son’s reaction, James Potter decided to talk nonchalantly to the boy who just wanted to hide.

“Remarkable for the first time, Harry.” James said.

Harry shrugged his shoulders, wishing desperately to be somewhere else at this moment.

Dorian smiled as Harry handed him back his broomstick. "Fun isn't it?"

Harry gave a brief nod. He was becoming increasingly self-conscious with all their gawking looks. "I would like to return to my room."

"It's such a nice day." James stated. "Sure you want to waste it inside."

"Yes." With this, Harry began his retreat back to the school, leaving James to race to catch up with him.

Sirius frowned as he watched the pair walk away. "He's just a kid."

Remus nodded his head. "Today, we truly saw him without the mask on. It only makes it harder, Padfoot."

"I think we are really getting through to him." Sirius retorted.

Remus snorted. "Harry is a child, yet he is still a weapon crafted by Voldemort. We would do well to not forget that."

Dorian listened in silence as his uncles conversed with each other. 'Uncle Remus is wrong. He has to be... just this once.'

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"What are you going to do, Dumbledore?" James asked quietly.

Dumbledore eyed James casually. "Are you alright, James?"

James exhaled quietly, his eyes becoming distant. "Yesterday, he smiled. He has Lily's smile."

The headmaster's eyes twinkled brightly, as he grasped the younger man's shoulder. "I intend to show him the truth."

"Just... I don't know." James stated with frustration evident in his voice.

"All will be well." Dumbledore turned toward his study's door. "I do not know how long this will take, so perhaps you should visit with Remus. You will not be missing anything here."

James nodded. After the headmaster had vanished he continued to stare at the door. 'Sometimes, Albus, I fear you fail to see people as they are, especially when you become too engrossed in your plans.' Reluctantly, James left to find Remus.

Inside Dumbledore's study, Harry waited for the headmaster to arrive. The sense of foreboding that he had felt yesterday morning had suddenly heightened. Harry did not notice the professor's entrance until he saw the aged man in his periphery view. Without a word, Dumbledore seated himself behind his desk. He stared into Harry's eyes. When Harry felt a rapid pull in his mind, he quickly raised his walls.

Dumbledore sighed. "I was afraid we would have to do this the hard way. I am truly sorry, Harry."

The quick assault on Harry's mind took his breath away. He rose to his feet as he struggled against Dumbledore's onslaught.

"Why?" Harry asked aloud.

'I need to see the end of the hallway.' The headmaster's voice echoed through his head, though he had not spoken a word vocally.

'No,' Harry felt his mind scream in pain as the walls he threw up were peeled aside.

'Please, Harry, let them down.' Dumbledore's voice beckoned. 'It will be painless.'

*His feet traveled down a hallway. At its end, he could see light emitting from a room. The doors were open, welcoming his entrance.*

'No,' Harry screamed answer, as the image distorted before it completely vanished.

Dumbledore pushed harder. Harry felt himself fall to his knees, but this did not stop the pain as more barriers fell.

*His diminutive hands clasped the wand, which seemed too big for them, until they hurt. His emerald eyes stared down the long corridor*

*with apprehension rising in his throat. Despite the fear, his legs carried him steadily forward as if they had a mind of their own.*

'Stop this!' Harry screamed as his finger dug into the floor of the study.

'I can't do that, Harry.' A solemn voice stated.

*"Father," a five year old Harry smiled, as he accepted the wand. "Thank you! I will use it well."*

*"I have no doubt that you will." His father stated, as he lifted his son's face. "There is something I need you to do for me. It is something that only you can do."*

Dumbledore was almost flung from Harry's mind with this last memory.

'What did he ask you to do, Harry?' He asked.

'Get out of my mind!' Harry gave another push, however the headmaster refused to budge. And with that last resistance, Harry's walls fell completely to the old man's attack.

*"Blood traitors, father?"*

*"Yes, Harry, they are pureblooded wizards who have betrayed the Wizarding world like Albus Dumbledore."*

*Harry cringed inwardly at the name. "They would take me away from you... like Dumbledore?" Harry said, stumbling on the wizard's name.*

*"Yes, Harry, they follow him."*

*"You're going to protect me for them. Won't you?"*

*Voldemort looked sadly down upon his son. "This time, Harry, I can't get to them. I need your help. You are going to protect both of us this time."*

*Harry smiled at the idea of helping his father. "What do I do?"*

'Please,' Harry found himself begging the headmaster.

*“Don’t worry, Harry, you will not be alone in this task. I will be with you.” Voldemort raised his wand, pointing it at Harry. With one motion from it, Harry felt his world drifting away and suddenly his mind felt fuzzy. However, he could still hear his father’s voice.*

*‘Come with me, Harry.’*

*On their own accord, his legs followed.*

Using his mind against the headmaster, Harry tried to change memories. Now He understood why his father had tried to teach him occlumency. His mind had never seemed capable to grasp it, because of that here he was now on his hands and knees before Albus Dumbledore. The pain was becoming unbearable, causing hot tears to fall from behind his tightly closed eyes.

*The door was opened and emitted light into the closed confines of the hallway. His legs carried him forth. The room came into view with its decorated walls, displaying various paintings and some wizarding family photos. One painting in particular caught his interest, as he traveled on. It was a pastoral scene... the very opposite of what would occur here this very night. Harry’s youthful mind desperately wished he could disappear into its canvassed world. But his legs would not allow him to do so.*

*The two people now turned to look at him. Some emotion seemed to flicker in their eyes, but Harry did not understand...*

In one vain attempt to stop the memory, Harry screamed. It fell on deaf ears.

*“Harry? Harry Potter?” The man asked dumbfounded when he noticed the boy that stood a few feet from him and his wife.*

*“Harry’s out right now.” Harry’s mouth repeated what his father’s voice said.*

*The man’s face froze. “Alice, he’s under-.”*

*His voice went forever mute, silenced by a green light that had emitted from Harry’s wand.*

*The woman with a round face screamed in horror as her husband fell back into the wall. Her brown eyes returned to Harry, as he stood his wand resting on her. "Please, Harry, you don't want to do this."*

*"I think I do woman." The voice of his father whispered.*

*A cry in the corner caused both their heads to turn.*

*"Neville!" She cried as she stepped in front of her son.*

*"It is not my intention for him to die... yet."*

*Tears sprang from her eyes. "Harry, please, do not let anything happen to my son. I ask only that."*

*Harry felt his wand hand suddenly quiver as his cloudy head cleared slightly. "I... Avada Kedavra!"*

*The woman fell to the ground before her son who watched Harry in terror. "Mommy!" He cried.*

*"It won't do for you to remember exactly what transpired here." Harry's voice paused. His hand moved, erasing the boy's memories and imprinting new ones in their place. Instead of seeing a boy with unruly black hair kill his parent, Neville saw a snake-like man wearing black robes. The boy that looked so much like his mother, collapsed to the ground in exhaustion. With one final flick of the wand, a lightning bolt shaped scar appeared on the boy's forehead.*

*Harry watched, as Neville slept. The fog cleared in his mind, and he looked at the woman in alarm. She was not breathing. The wand fell from his hand. The man was not breathing either. His hands shook violently as he picked up his wand and fled from the house. He understood now.*

*The assault suddenly came to an end. Dumbledore looked sadly down at the boy who had his forehead resting on the floor. He watched, as Harry's body shuddered with each sob that left his body.*



"I am sorry, Harry, that you had to witness that once more." Dumbledore whispered. "I had to show you how Voldemort used you to achieve his own ends. You had to know."

Harry's body stilled. Slowly, he raised his tear-stained eyes until they met Dumbledore's. "I will kill you." Harry whispered through clenched teeth.

Dumbledore shook his head. "Tom used the Imperius Curse on you, Harry. The Longbottoms' deaths served no purpose. It was senseless. Can't you see that?"

"He used that curse on me, so I wouldn't be the one killing them. He took those memories away so I would be able to sleep at night." Harry wiped his eyes with the balls of his hands. "I agreed to go into that house. My father gave me the choice."

"Harry-."

"Don't pity me!" Harry hissed, his eyes flaring. "You don't understand. After that murder not even a year passed before I was doing my father's bidding once more. Everything that I have done has been my choice."

"You do not enjoy what you do, Harry. Your soul is being broken into so many pieces." Dumbledore paused. "Let me give you another choice... a path away from the destruction that is impending if you stay on this course."

"I am not ignorant. I have seen and still feel your methods." Harry murmured, as he touched his hurting head. "You would only use me for your means just as my father often does. I choose my own path, Dumbledore, even if it leads me to the gates of hell."

The twinkle in the headmaster's eyes had long since died. "I refuse to lose you to that darkness that Tom has allowed to fester in your heart."

"You've already lost." Harry chuckled, as he looked out the window at the Quidditch Pitch. "Yesterday was only a dream... thank you for shattering it. I should have known better then to give into such

fantasy. People like me can never be happy; Destiny is always there to destroy what little hopes we have.”

“We will discuss this later.”

‘If I’m here later.’ Harry turned his back on the headmaster. “Mark my words, Dumbledore... your murder will be the first that I enjoy.”

He received no reply. Harry had not really expected one, so he continued out the door. He had no doubt that the Aurors were watching his every move, but he no longer cared. In the interior of his robe, he tightly grasped Draco’s note in his pocket. ‘He better have a way out.’

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*Harry’s little lungs hurt as he ran. He did not look where he was going. The buildings of London passed by him as he did so, turning into blurs. Hot tears refused to stop, despite his many attempts to quash them. He stopped running only when he reached a dark alley that turned out to be a dead-end. As he turned ready to leave it, Harry noticed a frail looking black horse standing at the mouth of the alley. His heart seemed to stop as he stared at the creature.*

*As if in an act of sympathy, the horse bowed its head to him. Harry’s panic abated, and he slowly approached the horse. Its white eyes watched Harry’s hand as it moved to pet it. As he stroke the horse’s nose, the tight knot in his throat loosened. Its ears suddenly perked, and without warning the horse spread its wings and flew away from Harry, leaving him dazed and confused.*

**Young Master?** Harry heard Nagini’s voice echo in the enclosed alley.

**They weren’t breathing, Nagini.** Harry hissed quietly.

*The large snake wrapped her body comfortingly around the small boy.*  
**Ssshh. Your father is very worried.**

***I killed his parents... he is alone.***

*Return with me, Harry. Your father will make it go away. The snake soothingly hissed into his ear. **It will trouble you no longer. Beside, your father made it so it wasn't you. Your body was just his vessel to get into the house. You helped your father so much.***

*Harry smiled at the snake, and in a small voice asked, **Really?***

*The snake appeared to smile. **Come your father is waiting. He will make this night disappear.***

*Harry rose to his feet. **I don't want to forget the horse, though.***

*The snake tilted her head looking perplexed. **What horse?***

*The edge of his lips twitched, threatening to turn into a smile. **Perhaps, later, Nagini... I want to see father.***

## Chapter Fifteen: Between the Books

The vicinity around Harry at the Gryffindor was empty, save for the seat beside him which was occupied by his biological brother. Ron Weasley's words still echoed through their minds, and not even Dumbledore's coaxing words could clear them. Harry could only hope that his escape was drawing nearer. Dumbledore would tire of his resistance, and Harry was certain before long that the students would realize him for what he truly was... Voldemort's assassin. Harry had no desire to visit Azkaban, even if its Dementors were absent.

"Did you sleep last night?" Dorian asked, eyeing the black lines that had formed under Harry's eyes.

Harry blinked and turned in his seat to eye his brother. "No."

"Today you don't have any classes, so perhaps you can take a nap." Dorian said brightly.

Harry shifted his eyes toward the head table where Dumbledore was eating happily, occasionally speaking with Professor McGonagall. He had no remorse. His head was not still ablaze with pain. He did not see the images replayed in his dreams.

"Harry?" Dorian asked somewhat taken aback by the flames that raged in his brother's eyes.

The light vanished from Harry's eyes, replaced with the dull look that had been there before. "What?"

A strange look passed on to Dorian's face. "Nothing."

"You're lying." Harry tilted his head. "I can see it in your eyes."

"I don't want to ruin this."

'He knows.' Harry thought indifferently. "You would let me go?"

Dorian focused his eyes on his plate. "Yes."

"Why would you do this for me?" Harry asked quietly.

Dorian shrugged his shoulders briskly. His face displayed a wide range of emotions. "It's hard to explain."

"Hmm... some things are better left unexplained." Harry stated, and then more softly added. "Thank you."

"Perhaps, one day when this is all over-."

"Perhaps." Harry murmured.

Harry blinked his eyes tiredly, before focusing them on Neville Longbottom. He quickly turned away when images of a boy cowering in a corner came to his mind. His heart thudded deadily in his body as he fought back the images.

"Harry, I have something that I want to give you." Dorian said completely unaware of his brother's turmoil. "I asked mum to send it to me."

Harry was slow to take the small wrapped package from his brother's hand. He knew he should not accept it, but perhaps just this once would be fine. Carefully, he peeled away at the muggle tape that bound the paper, being careful not to tear the paper. Dorian watched this in shock. He was used to ripping into his own packages with vigor. Deftly, Harry folded the wrapping paper neatly before opening the brown box. Inside the small box was a miniature replica of a Nimbus Two Thousand.

"That was my first broomstick. Mom and dad gave me this replica for one of my birthdays." Removing the tiny broomstick, Dorian showed Harry that it was charmed to fly in a circle. "Cool, eh?"

Harry's lips part slightly as gazed at the replica as it flew. "I can't take this. It was given to you by your parents."

Dorian shrugged his shoulders. "They would want you to have. Besides, before long, I will be getting a Firebolt replica from them. I want you to remember me."

Harry made no response. Instead, he grabbed his gift and stuck it in his robe's pocket. "Thank you."

Dorian beamed, and nodded his head.

Turning his head away, Harry noticed that the Grand Hall was emptying out. Soon James would be returning, and Harry would have to find away to get his biological father to take him to the library for his rendezvous with Draco. At the Slytherin table, he noticed that the young Malfoy was already missing. Sighing, Harry knew that it would not be hard to convince James to allow him to visit the library since Potter was filled with guilt for what little he knew of what happened while Harry was with Dumbledore.

Just as Harry had thought, James arrived.

"I would like to see Hogwarts' fabled library." He requested, keeping his voice uninterested.

"Sounds like a plan." James said.

"You guys have fun." Dorian paused to make a face. "I have double potions with Snape."

James's expression suddenly became guileful. "Find someway to amuse yourself. Snape is always good for that."

"An image of Snape wearing hot pink high heels, an orange dress, and a flowery hat is coming to mind."

Harry smirked thoughtfully. 'Why not? Just one more time to pretend I'm normal... besides it's Snape.' He thought. "Do something about his hair. It looks like it could use a good washing."

Both Dorian and James grinned.

"Will do!" Dorian called as he began his walk to class.

"Well, the library is this way."

Harry silently followed James. His guide did most of the talking, which was mostly pointing out certain aspects of the school. Harry noticed that James was avoiding the subject of what had occurred last night. Harry knew that Potter had been awakened during the night when he

would either wake with a start or continuously toss and turn. That morning the older man's eyes had radiated with grief mingled with remorse.

"And here we are."

The many rows of books awed Harry. His father's own library did not quite compare with Hogwarts'.

"Mr. Potter, how nice to see you, again." Hogwarts' librarian, Madam Pince, stated when she saw the pair. "I can remember all the detentions you and your friends served here. When you weren't messing around a lot was done."

"Madame Pince, seems like only yesterday." James said with a wide smile.

"I'm going to go look, while you talk." Harry said quietly.

James nodded his consent, and Harry took very controlled steps to find the potion section. He noticed immediately that the Potion section was next to the charms section. Draco and he would be talking between the books. A smirk flitted on to his lips. He began to utter the titles or authors of certain books loud enough for Draco to hear him. Harry soon was far from the hearing range of the front desk. There was no way they could see or hear his conversation with Draco, he was certain of it.

"*Potions of Great Potency* by Ulrich von Wetterstein." Harry mumbled of the title of an old leather-bound textbook.

"Marvolo?" A hushed whisper came from behind the book.

"Who else would be reading through these?" Harry scoffed, as he removed the book. Placing it safely on the floor, he looked up to see a good portion of Draco Malfoy's face. "Please, tell me you have my way out."

"Have you been sleeping? You look like a corpse." Draco observed.

“Always with the compliments?” Harry looked quickly down the aisle way of books. “Dumbledore has destroyed my sleep habits. I need to get out of here!”

Draco looked taken back. “What did he do to you?”

“None of your damn business!” Harry answered harshly. “Now tell me the plan.”

“There is this wardrobe in Hogwarts that is connected to one in Borgin and Burkes. Bellatrix is going to lead a small group of Death Eaters through the one there.” Draco paused. “We need to know how many Aurors and Order members are guarding you before we decide on how many will come through.”

“That is easy.” Harry paused slightly, calculating in his head their numbers. “Their ranks have been decreased greatly since my father’s attack on London. Most days are a total of twelve, not counting Dumbledore or Potter. James is almost always with me except when I am in classes. Besides him I am usually tailed by four. The other eight are positioned in various locations throughout the school. These locations are usually near where I am going to be during the day.”

Draco looked dumbstruck. “I’m impressed.”

Harry shrugged his shoulders. “They can’t do anything without me being aware of it. I am used to this kind of work.”

Draco looked enviously at Harry for a moment. “I will pass this information on to Bellatrix. It might be a month though before we can act.”

Harry had to restrain himself from reaching through the opening in the books and throttling the blonde youth. “That is unacceptable.” Harry said through clenched teeth.

His friend was astonished at Harry’s suddenly paler complexion. “What are they doing to you?”

“Draco,” Harry suddenly sounded extremely tired. “Just get me home soon.”



“You’re not going to be leaving us, are you?”

“No,” Harry muttered. “But soon Dumbledore will tire of me, and I can only take so much more of him breaking into my mind.”

“We will aim for this Friday. I am sure Bellatrix will be able to persuade the dear shop owners that it is in their best interests to lend us their store and wardrobe. We will get you out of here.”

Nodding, Harry briefly checked the aisle once more. “I need to break into Dumbledore’s office before I leave.”

“You’re going to kill him in Hogwarts? Are you crazy?” Draco said incredulously.

“He has my wand in his top right drawer. I plan on taking it back.” Harry paused. “Besides it is the brother to my father’s wand. It wouldn’t do to leave it in Dumbledore’s hands.”

“Best position yourself near the headmaster’s office before the attack.”

“I will consider it.”

Draco smiled briefly. “I think after this Friday I will have outgrown formal education.”

Harry smiled in response. “It will be like we always wanted... you and me working together.” Harry paused. “I have two items I need you to tell Bellatrix. One Dumbledore is mine, even if I am unable to kill him during the escape. I will find him eventually. I will not forgive him for what he has done. Secondly-.” His voice trailed off.

“Secondly, what?”

Harry turned his face away from Draco and quickly said. “I don’t want any of the Potters to die. I don’t care about the rest.”

“Marvolo?”

"It is nothing. I am loyal to my father... I just do not see any reason for them to die."

"I will inform her-." Draco was stopped before he could finish his sentence by Harry.

"They are coming." Quickly, Harry bent down and returned the potion book to its place.

"Did you find anything interesting?" James asked, as he peered at *Potions of Great Potency*.

"No, it was rather dry."

"Well, what do you have planned for the rest of the day?"

"I have not been able to see the whole school."

James tilted his head in surprise. "If that is what you want."

Harry nodded his head.

---

Draco rushed from the library. He could not help but look over his shoulder to make sure that not one of the many Aurors, who followed Marvolo, were not following him as well. Only when he reached his empty dormitory room did he feel secure. Opening his trunk, Draco removed a two-way mirror that his Aunt had bought in Knockturn Alley.

"Bellatrix Lestrage." As Draco whispered the name, his breath caused the surface of the mirror to cloud. He carefully wiped the mirror just in time to see his Aunt's face appear. "Aunt Bella."

"Cut niceties. Were you able to meet with Marvolo or not?"

Draco nodded his head. "We need to get him out by this Friday, before the old imbecile does anything further to him."

Bellatrix's expression sobered greatly. "I have everything ready on my end, except for forming the task force. How is your end?"

"I have the wardrobe fix." Draco stated. "Marvolo has given me the number of his guards, which is twelve. We should be able to handle them."

"It will be a day Dumbledore will not forget."

"Oh, Marvolo says the old fool is his to deal with." Draco paused. "He does not want the Potters to be killed."

Bellatrix look astounded. "Why?"

"He didn't say." Draco eyes went to the door briefly. "He says he is loyal to the Dark Lord."

Bellatrix nodded her head. "Then he is."

Draco silently agreed.

"Tell Marvolo that if he does not wish them to be harmed, he will have to find a means to get them out of the way. The task force will have no time to discern our enemies from bystanders."

"I will tell him."

A twisted smile covered her lips. "You have proved very useful, Draco. The Dark Lord will reward you greatly for the return of his son."

"Will he allow me to work with Marvolo?"

Bellatrix snorted. "If you don't slow Marvolo down, I don't see why not. You see, Draco, how lucky you were to be made Harry's playmate. It will have its perks after this."

"I think I am as eager as Marvolo to leave here."

"After this Friday, I think most students will be eager to leave Hogwarts." Bellatrix smirked. "Dumbledore will be in shame, and Hogwarts will perhaps have to shut there doors for good."

## Chapter Sixteen: Purgatory

Harry glanced quickly at the note that had been handed to him as Draco passed where he sat for breakfast. It was damp since it had landed in Harry's scrambled eggs. Delicately, Harry unfolded the piece of parchment, trying not to destroy the message. Eventually, he achieved success.

'The weather will be nice on Friday. The best time to go outside will be an hour after Divination. Concerning your second request, my Aunt says you should take care of it yourself as she does not have time to trouble herself.

A Friend'

Harry snorted. 'Take care of it yourself.' He turned his eyes toward James as he ate at the head table. 'A whole lot of work, you are putting yourself through, Marvolo. Why? Isn't that the question of my life?' His eyes turned down the table landing on Snape. As he stared at the potion professor, he plan formed in his head.

"Dorian?" Harry said aloud.

Across the table, his brother looked up at him.

"I need you to do me a favor." Harry said quietly. "It involves breaking into Snape's stash of special ingredients."

"What do you want from it?" Dorian asked confused.

"Wizard's Bane. It is an herb that causes a wizard to lose their powers for a week's span. They also suffer from a high fever." Harry eyed his brother for a reaction, and was pleased to see none. "No remedy can remove the symptoms. The patient has to suffer out the symptoms, until the herb has left the system. That usually takes up to two weeks to happen. The best feature is it is undetectable by humans."

"Who are you going to use this herb on?" Dorian asked noncommittally.

'Like I would tell you.' Harry thought mordantly. "Snape."

"Snape is always a special case in my book." Dorian's attention turned to the greasy professor. "When do you need it?"

"This afternoon at the latest."

"How do plan on getting him to take it?"

Harry smiled as his eyes slightly moved to James Potter. "I have my ways."

"It should be easy enough to get."

"Thank you, Dorian." Harry said. 'You will be saving your father's life.'

"I will see you when I have the potion."

'One item out of the way.' Harry thought to himself after Dorian had left him. His heart quickened when he thought ahead to this Friday which was approaching faster then he had expected. Now it was only two days away. To his immense surprise, Dumbledore had made no further attempts at gaining entry into his thoughts. 'That could change. I have to be careful.+ He cannot see what I have planned.'

With that last thought, Harry rose to his feet and walked toward his next order of business. "Longbottom." He whispered when he came to stop behind the boy. He, however, did not turn to face Neville when he addressed him. Instead, he continued to stare at the Great Hall's doors. "I need to speak with you."

"Neville, don't." Hermione Granger, who was seated by Longbottom, was quick to protest when her friend began to rise from the table.

"I'll be fine."

Hermione frowned. "Be careful."

Harry walked out of the Hall with Neville close behind. Luckily, it did not prove difficult to find a corner that was secluded. After a few

minutes of silence, Harry was certain that none of his guards had followed.

"You wanted to speak with me?" Neville slightly inclined his head in curiosity.

Harry did not meet his companion's eyes when he asked quietly. "How much is a life worth?"

Neville's mouth opened. "Wha... What are you talking about?" His hand slipped to his wand.

A smile crept onto Harry's face, though it was mirthless. "I have made your life hell, Neville, and you do not even know it."

"I don't follow you. I don't understand what you want."

"I want to know the value of life." Harry finally glanced at the baffled adolescent. "Did you love your parents, as much as I love my father?"

Neville mouth tightened. "I loved them dearly... your father took them away from me."

Harry laughed quietly. "He did not take them away, Neville. I did."

His mouth opened and closed but no words exited.

"You're speechless." Harry murmured quietly. "I have heard it said that you can not put a price on a life. But here I am attempting to do so."

"Why? Why care?"

Harry's green eyes returned to the stained glass window. "I love my father. I can not imagine being alone. Not only have I taken your parents' lives but I have also taken away your destiny, and given you my own in return. I have but one advice to give you, Neville. Do not become their poster boy. One person should not carry the responsibility of the world. It should be their task to unite and fight."

"They are afraid."

Harry snorted. "And we are not? Fear is not handicap. It is an excuse... their excuse. Leave them. Make them save their own skins."

"I can't do that."

"I figured that would be your answer." Harry leaned back into the stone wall. "You're far too noble for your own good, but I will not be the one to kill you, Neville... it would be like killing myself, because I could easily see our positions reversed."

Neville remained silent. "You asked before what the value of life was. I have your answer it is priceless. That is why I fight for them. Why do you fight, Harry?"

"For the love of a father, who might not love me, but I still love him." Harry grasped a chain that hung from his neck, and in one shift movement broke it. "This will not bring your parents back from the dead, but it might buy you time."

Dumbstruck, Neville took the Horcrux. "W-."

"Two reasons." Harry said quietly. "I made a subconscious promise when I was five, and secondly I want no debts to you. After this, we are even. You can try to kill my father, but you will go through me, unless my father wants you for himself."

"I understand." Neville turned to leave.

"Don't tell Dumbledore about the Horcrux. Keep it to yourself."

Neville's eyes narrowed. "Do you have something planned?"

"No," Harry lied. "I might be moving to Azkaban soon."

"I'm sorry."

"Do not pity me. I do not need it."

Once more Neville went to leave, before he paused. "Are they taking you to Azkaban on Friday?"

Harry's face drained of color. 'Can he possibly know?' "Why?"

"Dumbledore is going to be gone Friday. I think he might take you then."

"We will find out then." When Neville finally left him, Harry's face turned into one of rage. Angrily, he hit the wall with his fist. 'I will have to wait to kill the bastard. Luckily, I am very patient.'

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That evening came fast, and Harry found himself just biding his time. In his robes, he toyed with the vial that Dorian had managed to filch from Snape. Without further delving into his plan to use the potion, Harry had taken it from his biological brother. The only thing he had said to his brother was a warning. In which, he told Dorian that he should stay away from him from now on. The younger boy had been taken aback, but had chosen to remain silent. His silence left Harry with a sense of foreboding that would not leave him. Now however, he had brushed it aside. Harry had more important factors to worry about, like waiting for the perfect moment when he could pour the Wizard's Bane into James's tea. So far the cup had yet to leave the Auror's hand. Harry's stomach dropped suddenly when he noticed the fire in the hearth suddenly change to a familiar green. Only this time, the person on the other end did not exit the fire.

"Must be Lily." James said, as he left the table and his cup. "She was going to fire call this evening."

Harry smiled at the cup, and carefully removed the stopper from the bottle. Once he was certain that James was not looking he began to remove the vial from his robes. Then his heart stopped.

"James, is Harry there?" Lily said, from the fire.

"Yes, he's sitting at the table." James replied.

"I would like to see him."

James looked over his shoulder at Harry, and beckoned for him to come over. As soon as James's attention returned to Lily, Harry removed the potion, and he swiftly put three droplets into the tea.



“Do you want your tea?” Harry asked aloud.

“Bring it here.” James answered.

‘I love it when plans come together.’ Harry would have smiled but that would give him away.

Lily smiled at him from the fire. “So how have you been doing?”

Harry felt briefly sad for the woman. She desperately wanted her oldest son back, and she could never have him. “Fine.”

Out of the corner of his eyes, Harry watched as James swished his cup idly before taking a sip. The potion would take only minutes before it reacted with James’s blood.

Lily’s eyes looked trouble, as she peered out of the fire at Harry. “Why are you looking at me like that?”

Harry’s eyebrows rose. “Like what?”

“You look so-.” Lily’s voice cut off. “James!” She screamed as her husband fell to the ground.

Harry forced his eyes to open with surprise.

Lily, however, was not looking at him when she came out from the fire. Instead, her attention rested on James. She carefully rolled him onto his back, removing his glasses. Harry watched this before his gaze turned to the stain that covered the carpet. He was certain that James had received enough.

“Did he seem alright to you earlier?” Lily asked quickly.

“He was fine until just now.”

Lily rose to her feet and grabbed a handful of Floo powder. “Madame Pomfrey’s office.” She shouted in to the green flames. “Poppy, James has collapsed I need your help.”

Hogwarts’ school nurse instantly entered the room by way of the hearth. “Let’s see what is wrong.” Her gaze landed on Harry. He saw

the accusations in her eyes. As she checked James's vitals, Harry kept his expression void. The nurse already suspected him.

"It looks like Wizard Flu." The nurse finally proclaimed. Harry noticed the surprise in her eyes when she came to this conclusion. 'She wanted to believe I was trying to do him in.' Harry thought.

"What do we do, Poppy?" Lily's face was tightly drawn.

"I will take him with me, and pump him full of liquids." Pomfrey comfortingly continued. "And then you can take him home to get some much needed rest."

"What about Harry?" Lily asked quietly.

"Dumbledore will handle that, so don't worry."

Harry smiled. 'Do your worse, old man. I can kill any Auror that you hand me.'

"Don't fall behind." Pomfrey shouted over her shoulder to him, as she began to levitate James to the medical facilities. Doing as he was told, Harry followed the two women in silence.

As they laid the unconscious man on to the bed, Harry could not help but notice the irony. 'I have put you in a hospital twice for getting in the way.'

The door behind Harry opened, causing him to suddenly feel chilled. Turning his head, Harry came face to face with Albus Dumbledore. Dumbledore looked briefly at James before returning his stony gaze back on Harry.

"What do we have here, Poppy?" Dumbledore asked.

"A case of the Wizarding Flu, Albus."

"Harry, would you come with me."

The two women watched the silent showdown between the two men.

"Of course, Dumbledore." Harry said finally.

Once they were out of the hearing range of Lily and Madame Pomfrey, Dumbledore began his interrogation. His hands cupped under Harry's chin, forcing the youth to look up.

"Did you poison James, Harry?" Dumbledore asked evenly.

Harry felt a silent tug on his mind. "No."

"Why do you lie, Harry?"

"Test his blood."

There was a greater pull. Harry could no longer put up the walls required to stop the Headmaster. However, he did have one last resort. His mind went completely blank, showing no emotions.

"What are you hiding, Harry."

"Nothing! That is why I am able to face you." Harry said through clenched teeth. "I have not touched him."

Dumbledore frowned. "I am sorry. I have seemed to have misjudged you."

"Thank you for trusting me." Harry whispered snidely.

"I will get you another Auror as your personal guard. I was thinking that Sirius Black would make a good replacement."

"I detest Black." Harry said with a brief shrug.

"Would you prefer someone you don't know?" Dumbledore asked in surprise.

Harry nodded his head. "I hate the people I know here, so give me someone new to hate."

Dumbledore's face became downcast. "I wish you would allow me to help you."

Harry snorted. "I help myself now."

"If you ever need my help-."

"I will never need your help." Harry paused. "If I ever did, I would kill myself before I would ask for your help."

Dumbledore nodded his head. "I will have your new guard here by Thursday morning, until then you are not to leave Madame Pomfrey's or your mother's side. Do I make myself clear, Harry?"

"Perfectly transparent."

The headmaster shook his head as he walked to a destination that Harry could not guess. Feeling the eyes of the Aurors, Harry returned to the infirmary. His day of escape would be here to soon. His only regret was that Dumbledore was not going to be there to see it.

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Author's Note: Chapter 17 When Wardrobe Doors Open should be done soon, rather looking forward to getting that one done. It will be longer! Yeah... blackmail is great... it works... and reviews are so nice... there is your hint to get Chapter 17. Sooooo Evil.

Side Note: I do have a challenge for you, my readers: everyone who reads leave a review. I know this probably will never happen... but I can dream. ;)

### Teaser for Chapter 17

'Dorian.' Harry thought numbly as he watched a Death Eater heft the young boy into air, cutting off his air flow. 'Moron. I told you not come near Dumbledore's office.' Without out hesitation, Harry moved in. "Put him down."

"Who do you think you are?" The Death Eater spat. "You are nothing!"

Harry eyes narrowed dangerously. "I am the Dark Lord's son."

The man snorted. "You just a kid with glasses."

A dark sneer covered Harry's face. "And you are a fool to question me." Harry snorted when the man made no move to obey. "Then I will have to show you." Harry replied caustically.

## Chapter 17: When Wardrobe Doors Open

Harry watched with little interest as the students around him worked diligently on their potions. Snape for some reason had determined that Harry should not be allowed anywhere near a cauldron during this Friday morning's potion class. Harry did not object to Snape's ruling. He had other items to occupy his mind, such as getting into the prestigious Headmaster's Study without the correct password. He knew that Dumbledore usually selected bizarre passwords that were usually some form of candy. 'Pity there is so many sweets in the world. At least, Neville was correct about the fool being gone for the day.'

"Potter." Snape's cold voice broke through his thoughts. "Follow me."

Harry rose from his seat and, as he passed down the alley, he was almost tripped by a certain redhead, who along with the rest of his family had returned Thursday morning. Harry had gathered that their mother had not wished them to miss school. Harry knew Mrs. Weasley would be haunted by that decision for the rest of her life, especially if one her children was caught in the crossfire this afternoon.

"Weasley." Harry hissed under his breath. "I would stay away from me, if you value your life."

"You are going to pay for what you have done." Weasley replied under his breath.

"Potter!"

"Coming, Professor." Harry called.

Snape waited patiently, however his eyes held an emotion that Harry could not decipher. "Come with me to my potion storage, Potter. I have something that I wish to show you."

Harry wisely remained silent until he was left alone with an enraged Snape.

“Potter, I am missing a very rare potion, which is created through the burning the sap of a certain herb known as Wizard’s Bane. Wizard’s Bane,” Snape repeated the name of the herb slowly, making certain that Harry would understand what he was getting at. “It was almost made extinct during the 1700’s after many incidents that led to death.” Snape whispered, his voice carrying an air of knowledge. “I dare say that you have used the juice of the plant before in one of your many undertakings. You used Wizard’s Bane to weaken your objectives, making them easier to be taken down. I know this is true, because I brewed that potion for your uses.”

“What are you insinuating?”

“It is curious how James Potter has suddenly fallen ‘ill’ at the same time I am missing a potion brewed from Wizard’s Bane.” The professor tore into the youth with his stare.

Harry kept his face clear of emotion. “That is curious.”

Snape’s eyes flashed with fire. “I know you did it.”

Harry tilted his head and thought with humor. ‘Touché... but I can go one further.’ Clearing his throat, he stated lightly. “Ask my guards, they will tell you that I have not been anywhere near this room.”

“So it would seem.” Disappoint was in the professor’s eyes, though the gleam of knowing had not left them. “Return to your seat, Mr. ‘Potter’ I have no further want to speak with you.”

Harry nodded, leaving the dank storage room. He ignored Weasley’s cold stare and continued to his seat. His eyes looked down at a watch that he had managed to take without their owner’s noticing. ‘One more class... and approximately two more hours before this nightmare reaches its conclusion.’ He could not wait to feel his wand in his hands. ‘I will be able to walk freely again. It has been too long.’ Stretching in his seat, Harry peered eagerly at the door. For the first time, he was finding it difficult to wait. ‘I have watched targets for hours on end, but now I can’t stand to sit still for not even two hours.’ He thought with humor.

Across the room, Draco looked just as fidgety and managed to explode his cauldron, or perhaps it was a combination of Neville and Draco that caused it. Snape stormed over and with one flick of his wand cleaned the mess. However, a foul stench accompanied by a blue mist had already filled the room.

“Class dismissed.” Snape called over the coughs of the students. “Your homework is to read pages five hundred to five hundred and seventy-five by next time we meet.”

A collective amount of groans filled the room, even as the students hurriedly packed their items. In the chaos, Draco was easily able to talk to Harry briefly.

“Did Potter show you the Room of Requirements?” He whispered.

Harry curtly nodded.

“Be there as quickly as you can.” Draco looked around briefly. “We will hold them off until you arrive.”

Harry did not need to say anything, so he left before his personal ‘escort’ came in looking for him. Where as James would patiently wait for him to exit a room, Auror Palmer would enter and forcibly pull him out. Harry was going to enjoy snapping his neck.

Just as Harry had suspected, the tall lanky Auror was about ready to enter the classroom to find him. “I have Divinations next... I would not dream of missing it, even in my fondest fancy.” His voice dripping his sarcasm.

“You were slow in leaving your potions class.”

“It is called packing my books.”

“In that time, you could have easily conversed with an enemy agent, or grabbed an item that could be used as a weapon.”

‘If he only knew.’ Harry thought as he walked to Divinations.



Divinations so far was proving to be annoyingly monotonous. Trelawney had brought out the Tarot cards. The cards had failed to predict the near future, Harry noticed silently. Throughout the class Trelawney, as she had done the time before, kept her distance from Harry.

As the professor circled around the room, looking over the shoulder of students to see what their cards read, she came to a pause by Lavender Brown. "Oh, my dear." She whispered. Her face suddenly paler than it had just moments before. "This is not good."

The other students immediately moved to peer over Lavender's shoulder, reading her cards.

"What does it mean?" The frightened girl asked in a mere whisper.

Tears formed in Trelawney's eyes. "My dear, according to the cards you are going to fall along way." She said as she pointed to the first card. "Surprisingly, you will survive." Finally, Trelawney arrived to the third card. "But it will be as if you hadn't."

"What about the last two cards?" Patil asked.

"The fourth card suggests that Miss Brown will fall from stairs. The final card wishes her courage and resolve."

Lavender picked up the fourth card with her trembling hand. "Are the cards always correct?"

"No, they are not." Trelawney answer, though Harry could see in her eyes that she was lying to the girl. The professor truly did believe in the cards.

After a long period of silence, other students began to ask Trelawney to read their cards. Harry did not understand why since the divinations professor preferred to give out gruesome fates to them.

"What does Harry's say?" Lavender, who had finally found her voice, asked.

Trelawney looked startled before she squeamishly moved to view Harry's cards much to his dissatisfaction.

"As I suspected, these are not happy cards... so many horrible meanings. But it is to be expected." Trelawney stated serenely. "A very unhappy life awaits you. I dare not read these cards aloud."

The students that surrounded Harry's table leaned forward to get a closer look at the cards.

"Why did he receive the devil?" Patil asked. She was now pointing toward the fourth card on the table.

Trelawney frowned. "He knows what it means." She stated briskly before turning the subject to homework. "Now everyone, please, return to your seats and be prepared to copy your homework assignments. My inner eye has told me that you will need practice with the Tarot cards. You will record your findings every night this week until next Friday."

Harry was the first to leave the classroom. It was awhile before Palmer fell into step with him.

"Follow me." Harry stated calmly, though he brimmed with anticipation.

"And why should I do as you say?"

"You are paid to follow me, and I want to take a walk." With those words, Harry began his slow walk to the area in which Dumbledore's office lay.

Silently, Harry found it bizarre to be walking in synch with a person that in just minutes he would kill. They did not speak. No words were necessary. Harry led, while the guard followed. The Auror would not realize until much later that Harry was leading him to his death. Neville's words echoed briefly through Harry's mind, 'All life is priceless.'

"Yet it must be taken." Harry murmured. "Because I cannot be a grain of wheat."

“What did you say?” Palmer asked not understanding Harry’s meaning.

Harry was never given the chance to answer the Auror’s question. In the distance, terrified screams echoed through the school. One word wafted to the Aurors’ ears and that was ‘Death Eaters’. Palmer withdrew his wand. In doing so, he turned his back to Harry. Fear etched the Auror’s face as he waited for an attack from the Death Eaters that had entered Hogwarts. Harry smiled forlornly at the back of the Auror, even though he felt no regret for his actions that were coming.

“You shouldn’t be frightened of them.” Harry murmured, moving closer to the Auror. “I am the real threat.”

By the time Palmer turned to face Harry, it was already too late. His body went limp. He had lost all movement when his neck had been broken. Harry allowed the Auror’s body to drop to the floor, causing a thudding sound to resound against the silence. Grasping the dead man’s wand, Harry moved quickly to avoid the spells created by the remaining two guards. The other eight were already dealing with the Death Eaters, who were probably fanned throughout the school.

Hiding behind a statue of armor, Harry wished that he could have his daggers. He always felt pleasure in using them. A spell panged against the armor, and by chance it almost grazed Harry’s ear. Stepping out from his hiding place, Harry sent a jet of red light at one of the Aurors. Blood later accompanied the spell as it crashed into the stone wall beyond, proving that Harry had hit his target. The ruby substance slowly flowed down the rough surface before it became one with a large pond on the floor, which matched its color.

“Damn it!” Harry heard the man’s companion shout.

Harry rolled to his left, avoiding a fatal green light that screamed from the second Auror’s wand.

“I don’t have time to play.” Harry stated quoting a line that Bella was very fond of using.

The Auror dodge his first attack, causing Harry's brow to furrow. Palmer's wand was so much weaker in his hands. 'I will have to get closer to him, and do it the hard way.'

With lightening speed, Harry closed the space between them. He easily evaded the barrage of spells that exited from his former guard's wand. In a dive, Harry used his legs to knock the unprepared Auror on to his back. Shaking his head down at the Auror, Harry brought up his wand. He knew better then to gloat over desperate men. A green light emitted from his wand. Even in death, the Auror's face continued to portray the horror that he felt as he awaited his death.

Harry raised Palmer's wand to his face, examining its wooden body. "Worthless." He hissed as he threw it at the corpse of its master.

In a run, Harry continued his journey to Dumbledore's office. He would be better able to defend himself if he had his wand. Before he had turned the corner, Harry knew something was off. His first thought was that perhaps Dumbledore had returned early. However, the voice did not belong to the headmaster. In the back of Harry's mind, he recognized it as a Death Eater's. He had probably sought out Dumbledore's office in hopes of making a name for himself by killing the Dark Lord's most hated enemy.

"What do we have here?" The voice asked.

Harry cringed when he heard a second voice. It was one that he would not be able mistake no matter how many years would pass.

'Dorian.' Harry thought numbly, as he watched a Death Eater heft the young boy into air, cutting off his air flow. 'Moron. I told you not come near Dumbledore's office.' Without hesitation, Harry moved in. "Put him down."

"Who do you think you are?" The Death Eater spat. "You are nothing!"

Harry eyes narrowed dangerously. "I am the Dark Lord's son."

The man snorted. "You're just a kid with glasses."

A dark sneer filled Harry's face. "And you are a fool to question me." Harry snorted when the man made no move to obey. "Then I will have to show you." Harry replied caustically, even as he raced down the hallway.

Seeing Harry barreling at him, the Death Eater tossed Dorian aside. As he ran, Harry removed his quill from his inner pocket. In series of shift motions, Harry pushed the writing utensil through the man's skin and into his throat. Blood sprayed Harry's face and drenched his hand and robe's sleeve. A gurgling noise escaped the man's ravaged throat. Releasing his grasp on the quill, Harry's hands positioned themselves around the man's neck. In one sudden movement, Harry snapped it. The sound echoed dissonantly down the hallway.

Turning his attention to Dorian, Harry saw him cowering against the wall. His eyes were wide in fear. Noticing he was the focus of his brother's attention, Dorian bit down on his lower lip.

"Are you frightened by me?" Harry asked quietly. There was no answer and Harry went to move past his younger brother.

"You saved my life." Dorian whispered in a small voice.

Moving toward Dorian, Harry offered him his blood soaked hand. In his brother's eyes, Dorian saw the silent challenge. Freely, Dorian clasped the hand and allowed himself to be pulled to his feet. Harry released his brother's hand once he was on his feet. Raising his hand to his face, Harry touched the blood splotches on his face. It was not the first time that another's blood had dotted his face, yet it was.

"This is the first time that I have ever killed without my father's request." Harry said pensively. "To save life." This last thought Harry voiced so quietly that Dorian could not hear his words.

Dorian stroked his bruised neck that bore the imprint of the deceased Death Eater's hands. "I'm glad you did."

Harry frowned deeply. "This can't happen again. After this, Dorian, you are on your own. I can't save you ever again! I just can't."

"Won't Voldemort be angry with you?" Dorian asked concernedly.

"No, the man was a fool, even if he did not recognize me." Harry stated firmly. "My father would have killed him too for disobeying a direct order."

"Are-."

"Go." Harry whispered. "Stay away from the corridors that are near the Room of Requirement. If you wander there I will not save you."

Dorian nodded. His face displayed his sorrow, but Dorian did not voice his thoughts at the moment. He knew that this would be the last time he saw Harry. After what seemed like moments, Dorian turned to leave, however Harry's grabbed his arm.

"I am sorry. I can not be what your family wants me to be." Harry whispered. "It would be nice to pretend that I could, but I have seen... done too much. I can never be a child, again. In the end, none of us would be happy living a lie, no matter how pleasant it would appear."

Dorian nodded his head curtly. "Do what you feel you need to do, Harry. I'll miss you."

Harry shook his head. "You will miss the idea of having a brother... not me. I have never been a brother to you, Dorian."

Dorian smiled briefly. "Good bye, Harry."

Harry nodded his good bye, and proceeded down the hallway. Dorian's voice called to him one last time before the youth left for safety. "The password is Chocolate Cockroaches."

Harry smiled as he approached the gargoyle that safeguarded Dumbledore's private study. Before he left it, he had plans to redecorate the room. He muttered the password that Dorian had given him, and watched as the gargoyle moved out of his way. To his pleasure, the room was empty except for Dumbledore's pet phoenix. When the bird saw him, it instantly fled. There was no doubt in Harry's mind that the bird had flown in search of its master. Harry smiled as he pried open the top right drawer. It felt so good to hold his wand once more. A wicked grin spread across his face as he surveyed the room. With one powerful wave, he sent the

headmaster's prized possessions to the ground. Delicate instruments shattered when they hit the ground, causing their debris to spread throughout the room. Books hit walls, while the shelves fell as splinters across the room.

'Much better.'

On the wall behind the desk, Harry used his wand to write, 'You brought this on yourself old man. We will meet again, and on that day you will die.'

Harry's hands took the glasses from his face. 'Goodbye, Harry Potter.' Then he used his wand to cast a vision correction spell. He laid his discarded glasses on to the desk before setting the desk ablaze. His only regret was that he would not be able to see Dumbledore's face when the old fool gazed upon his smoldering desk and destroyed study.

Content, Harry left the room running as quickly as he could toward the Room of Requirement. He did not know how long it would be before Dumbledore and a whole new group of Order Members and Ministry lackeys arrived. Harry was not a fool. He knew that the Death Eaters would not be able to hold out against Dumbledore in Hogwarts. His father was all too aware of that fact. There would be no beating Dumbledore if he were in Hogwarts, thus the Dark Lord had never attacked the school.

As he neared the hallway in which his destination was located the sounds of battle reached his ears. So intent on his goal, Harry did not notice the sound of feet behind him until it was too late.

"Stop!" Ronald Weasley shouted. His wand directed toward Harry's head. "Dumbledore was an idiot to allow you into this school. Some of my friends are dead because of you!"

Harry stared blankly at the adolescent.

"You have no remorse even at the end of your life?"

"No." Harry stated unconcerned. "I gave those I have killed a better death than what my father would have. Quick and nearly painless."

A red bolt hit Harry in the shoulder, pushing him backward. The force caused him to drop his wand.

"You sick bastard."

Harry touched the wound that had just been afflicted on him. When he removed it, watery material glistened on his fingers. "Lesson one about killing someone, Weasley, you do not toy with them. If you do not kill them immediately, they have a habit of coming after you."

"Shut-up!"

Harry pushed himself onto his feet. "You do not have what takes to kill someone."

Ron paled at his words. "I can kill someone like you!"

"You would have done a long time ago if you could."

"*Avada-*." His words however were drowned out by a loud. "*Crucio!*"

Bellatrix Lestrangle came into sight. She glared down at the red head as he withered in pain, calling for the punishment to end. Bellatrix did not remove the spell. Instead, she heightened its intensity. A malevolent sneer came to her red dyed lips. Eventually, she lifted it and turned to face a worn Harry.

"Did this piece of shit wound you badly, Marvolo?"

Harry peered at his bleeding wound that was darkening the black of his robes. "I have had worse."

"Still," Bellatrix whispered. "He should be taught a lesson... how not to mess with his betters."

With a slashing spell, Bellatrix caused Weasley to yelp in pain as his blood stained the floor. With a banishing charm, Lestrangle pushed the wounded Weasley out the window, sending the stained glass window shards into every direction.



"I do not think he will be able to put your lesson it to use, Bella." Harry stated.

"It is not my fault if my students prove so weak that they cannot survive the lesson."

"That reminds me why I should be grateful to father that he did not make you my teacher!"

Bellatrix smiled warmly. "Let's leave this place."

Harry nodded, and the two bolted down the raging hallway that was filled with the feuding Death Eaters and the servants of the light. Along the way, Harry had to step two corpses. He did not pause to examine them.

"To the Room." Bellatrix screamed above the chaos. The Death Eaters hearing her command retreated. Once inside the room, Harry was the first to travel through the wardrobe, followed closely by Draco.

On the other side, Harry was greeted by the sight of the interior of Borgin and Burkes, one of the few places to survive Voldemort's rampage through Diagon Alley.

"You should really heal that, Marvolo." Draco stated causally.

Harry nodded his head, before using a healing charm on his punctured shoulder. He left his robes torn since he would no longer have need for school robes.

Bellatrix was the last to exit the wardrobe. When she did, her face was bright with bloodlust. Harry had seen that expression so many times before and had long since grown accustomed to it. Draco, however, was astounded.

"We will apparate-." Bellatrix's voice was cut off when a spell went through the glass store window. "The Ministry is here!"

"Surrender yourself!" A deep voice called.

"Dumbledore." Harry whispered, moving to the broken window.

“Marvolo, don’t.” Bellatrix hissed under her breath. “The whole Ministry is out there. This is not the time for a last stand!”

Harry did not appear to hear her, as he careful peered over the ledge. Dumbledore was not in sight.

“The best option is to return to your father’s side and regroup.” Bellatrix stated firmly. “Do you wish to be captured, again?”

“There will be no capturing me alive again.”

“I ask you, my Lord, to go to your father’s side!” Bellatrix paused briefly. “There will be other opportunities to kill Albus Dumbledore. We have to hurry before they set up the Anti-Apparation barriers!”

Harry nodded.

The sound of many popping sounds carried their way to the ears of Albus Dumbledore. His mouth was firmly set in a frown. They had arrived far too late. They had set up the barriers too late. In doing this, he had failed his students, staff, and all of Hogwarts. He had failed Harry just as he had failed himself.

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Harry landed easily just miles away from his father’s fortress. This was as close as anyone could apparate do to various charms the Dark Lord had set up. The fortress was also uncharitable, and possessed many charms that repelled Muggles and those magical folks that did not have an invitation.

Bellatrix came to stand beside him. “Your father is eagerly waiting.”

‘I had no doubt that he would be.’ Harry thought. A sensation that Harry had long associated with fear rose up into his throat. He did not relish the thoughts of what questions his father would pose. Harry was not even certain if he could answer them. His actions of late were inexplicable, even to him. Then there were the slight changes in himself that Harry was certain that would not please his father. ‘This meeting will reveal many things... like if he ever cared for me.’

“Marvolo?” Bellatrix asked aloud, breaking effortlessly through Harry’s contemplations.

Harry nodded his head. “We had best not keep him waiting.”

## In My Father's House

Dorian helped where he could. His mind flowed back to the hallway that held the bodies of dead Aurors, who had once been his brother's guards, as he did his tasks. 'Do I hate him? They were my father's and godfather's colleagues. They easily could have been my father or my uncles.' Dorian pondered reflectively. He felt cold after he reached his answer. 'I don't hate him, even after this. He is just as confused.'

His thoughts were interrupted when he saw Madam Pomfrey levitating the body of Lavender Brown into the Grand Hall, which had become a headquarters of sorts. It was the hospital, morgue, and a meeting location. Slowly, he walked toward the six year's body certain that she was dead. Madam Pomfrey met his gaze, and smiled briefly.

"She's alive, though I am not certain if she can be revived from the coma." The school nurse paused. "In the confusion, she fell from the staircase. Miss Brown is lucky to be alive."

Dorian nodded, as he pulled his attention away from the pallid face that had once been so full of life. At the entrance, he heard wailing that almost sounded like laughter, but Dorian knew better then to mistake it. Hermione Granger's trembling body came into view with Neville Longbottom supporting her. Her eyes were blurred with tears as her sobs raked her young body. Certainty filled Dorian's heart. 'Ron is dead. His body most have been badly disfigured if they did not bring him here.' He thought numbly when the three remaining Weasleys and Hermione embraced. 'So many are dead. Professors Flitwick and Sprout are dead. Lavender is closer to death then life. Then there are the many wounded.'

Dorian did not even notice his mother's presence until her frantic embrace. Her shaking hand touched his face, checking for any injuries.

"I'm fine." Dorian stated to ease his mother's fear.

"Your neck is bruised." Her voice sounded extremely shaky.

His hazel eyes gleamed slightly. "I would have the bruise rather than its alternative." Dorian said hoarsely.

Lily's eyes widened in horror. "Oh, Dorian."

"Don't worry yourself, mom." Dorian said soothingly as he returned his mother's embrace.

"Harry has escaped, hasn't he?" Lily asked quietly, being sure that Dorian would be the only one to hear her question.

"Yes." Dorian was not surprised to see his mother's eyes began to water. "I would not give up on him, mom. Not just yet."

His mother met his eyes. Her emerald eyes fought against the hope that she desperately wanted to feel. "Why, Dorian?"

"He saved me." Dorian continued to hold the invisible connection that flowed between his eyes and those of his mother's. "We might never be together as a family, but there is still hope for Harry."

"I don't understand." Lily whispered as she gazed intently at her youngest son.

"When you truly care about someone, you have to let them go. Harry was in pain while he was here at Hogwarts." Dorian paused. "We have no right to ask him to remain here."

Lily gasped not at Dorian's simple proclamation, but at the looming form of Albus Dumbledore. The old man just continued to peer serenely at the pair over the rims of his glass.

"Dorian," Dumbledore began. "You gave Harry the password to get into my study."

The young boy met the Headmaster's gaze evenly. "I did."

Dumbledore looked extremely disappointed. "The ministry will most likely take legal actions against you for this action, Dorian. With the current state of affairs, I am afraid they might even charge you with knowing of the attack beforehand."

"Albus, surely there is something you can do!" Lily pleaded just as Dorian answered the headmaster's question.

"I had no idea." The fourteen year stated calmly, keeping his voice hushed. "I would never allow this to happen." He waved at the battered student body that lined the Great Hall.

"I believe you, yet there is so much evidence against you."

Dorian's mouth dropped. "What evidence?"

"In the days prior to the attack, you were seen in Harry's company quite frequently." The Headmaster's brow creased.

"He's my brother!"

Dumbledore shook his head. "He is only Voldemort's puppet. If Tom Riddle pulls the right string, Harry will kill you. Give up any hope of his return."

Dorian's eyes burned in defiance. "He saved my life, killing a Death Eater."

The older man sighed. "He did so to trick you into giving him the password so he could enter my private study."

The adolescent stubbornly shook his head. "You're wrong!" His shout bringing everyone's attention to their conversation.

"You do not understand Harry and his capabilities." Dumbledore said sadly. "I made the same mistake, Dorian. Do not allow him to trick you as he did me. It just might lead you to your death."

"You still underestimate him."

"I will not do so again."

Lily shaking stepped away from the Headmaster. "You're going to kill my son? This is your fault!"

Dumbledore shook his head and quickly tried to placate the terrified woman. "I will do all in my power to take Harry alive."

Lily snorted. "You promised you would save my son from Voldemort! Your words mean nothing to me! When James recovers from the Wizards Bane that I assume Harry used to save him from this attack, he will speak with you on your conduct."

"I truly am sorry that this did not end better, Lily. You must believe me."

"Leave us. And stop your meddling in our affairs."

Dumbledore bowed to Lily before he left. Lily was shaking in rage. "We will get your brother back."

"No, mom, we can't." Dorian paused. "Harry told me before he left that we are not to come after him. He would have no other choice but to kill us. We should not let all his work to keep us alive go to waste. Besides keeping Harry with us would be like putting him in a gilded cage."

"It scares me to see you acting so mature." Lily whispered. "It is a sign of the horrible days to come."

Dorian smiled briefly. "Everything will work out, though to us it might not appear to be the best ending. It's not for us to decide."

"I am proud of you." Lily whispered. "Your father and I will not let the Ministry take you away."

Dorian's eyes became distant. "The Ministry has other items to occupy their minds."

Lily nodded her head. "Especially with the closure of Hogwarts." Lily looked sadly at her son. "It's official now. Hogwarts is to shut down until Voldemort is no longer a threat."

"I never thought I would see the day."

"With the war, it was bound to happen eventually." Lily smiled wistfully as she peered at the Grand Hall's ceiling that showed the bright shining stars over head. "The strongest foothold against Voldemort has been breached. On what should be a very dark night

the stares are shining so bright.” Tears welled up in her eyes as she wrapped her arm around Dorian’s shoulder. “It seems fitting, however.”

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The darkness was oppressive as it shrouded the contents of the large room that Harry knew as his father’s study. Never in his memories had the room been so menacing to him. Usually, the study had been a place of comfort after long days of studies. His legs ached from the period of time that he had stood upon them. How long had been standing there, he could not even fathom. He did not dare stretch his muscles that would only signal weakness. To his left, he heard Nagini as she slithered across obsidian tiled floor. No doubt was in his mind that she was moving to his father’s side. The Dark Lord had been in the room from the beginning. Harry knew this for he had felt his father’s presence even as he had opened the door to enter the study. ‘How long will he wait before he reveals himself?’ Harry wondered silently.

It was almost as if his father had heard his thoughts. “It seems so long, Harry.”

Harry’s eyes shifted to the vicinity where the voice had emitted from. “It does seem like years.”

There was silence once more. Fear rose up in Harry’s chest for the first time that he had been in his father’s presence.

“I am still loyal to you, father.” Harry spoke aloud to the shadows as he sought to ebb his father’s concerns. “I will still do as you wish.” The fear that he felt seeped into his voice as he spoke.

“Loyalty,” Voldemort whispered. “Where was your loyalty when you allowed the Potters to live? They are my enemies. They would have me dead.”

Harry could almost touch his father’s anger and hatred that seemed to imbue the room. “That is not why I allowed them to live.” “Why, Harry?” Voldemort hissed. “Prove to me that you still understand the meaning of loyalty.”



"I don't know." Harry cried expressively.

Out of the shadows, Voldemort entered into his view. Carefully, he cupped his hands under Harry's chin, raising the youth's haunted eyes to meet his own. "What have they done to you? Such pain in your eyes... never have I seen them so troubled."

Harry opened his mouth to respond, but his father shook his head.

"There is no need for a response, Harry." He whispered. His hands returned to his sides. "I can make the pain end."

Understanding flashed into Harry's eyes. "Let me stand by your side."

The Dark Lord turned away unable to meet his son's eyes. "Then explain your actions that have led to the death of one of my Death Eaters."

"He refused to obey me."

"Over a Potter, you killed him. What was the importance of saving the wretch?"

'All life is priceless.' Harry swallowed hard. "I need him to live. I need them to live."

Voldemort's head tilted toward Harry as his son struggled for the words that would help his father to understand.

"You need them to live for what, Harry? What can they possibly give you that I have not already provided?"

"I need them to be an image. Like the one I saw that night on Longbottoms' wall." Harry whispered. "I am happy to be with you... I just need that image."

The Dark Lord frowned. "I don't understand."

"Neither do I."

Voldemort walked to a chair that sat beside his fireplace. Slowly, he sat into its comforting confines. "In the end, Harry, there can be no in

between. You have to commit full-heartedly, or you will slowly destroy yourself. It is said that killing tears a person's soul into many pieces. Killing is a much kinder way of breaking a soul for a soul can be broken many ways. Indecisiveness will destroy a person's soul just as surely as killing." Voldemort's voice trailed off. "If you remain with me, would you be able to kill the Potters if they choose to destroy me?"

Harry hesitated slightly, and silently prayed his father would not notice. "I would gladly kill or die for you."

The only sound that could be heard was the movements of Nagini. Her presence calming Harry's racing heart.

"Hmph." Voldemort murmured. "You say that, yet you have given a piece of my soul to Dumbledore."

The color drained from Harry's face. "I did not give it to Dumbledore-." Unbelievable pain filled Harry's body as he crumpled to the floor. It was the first time his father had ever used the Cruciatus Curse on him, and he was completely unprepared. "Please-."

The curse lifted. "You gave it to his puppet, thus giving it to Dumbledore."

"I had too." Harry whispered desperately, even as the pain returned with another casting off the curse.

"Did they put a wand to your head?" Voldemort asked quietly. "Or did you break the chain and hand it to the bumbling Boy Who Was Allowed to Live? Be truthful, Harry."

Even as he struggled to his feet once more Harry looked pleadingly at his father. "I gave it to him. I killed his parents-."

"I killed his parents, Harry." His father's voice took a softer tone.

"There was a moment." Harry began once his composure and voice had returned. "When-."

"The Imperius Curse lifted slightly." Voldemort finished Harry's sentence.

"I remember her face... her words." Harry paused deep in his own thoughts. "At that moment I made a promise to her, though I did not speak it aloud. I'm sorry, father."

No curse was hurled at Harry, and he felt surer of his situation.

"Is your promise to her fulfilled?" His father asked evenly.

"Yes."

Even though he could not see his father, Harry was certain his father nodded his head. "I have always taught you the importance of keeping your word, and being true to your station in life. Despite the set back that you have caused me, I am proud of you."

"You shouldn't be." Harry muttered. "I should not have been so easily taken. That alone should make you embarrassed of me. I shamed your teachings. I allowed Dumbledore entry into my mind. If he had not been so intent in my past, he could have discovered many of your plans."

"That is enough, Harry." His father's voice sounded surprisingly calming. "What is done is done. Now I need your answer... Do you stand by me? And do not answer until you are certain for once you decide there will be no returning."

"I stand by you."

Voldemort pulled himself from the chair, though his back returned turned toward Harry. "In my mind, I can assume the words that Dumbledore has told you." Voldemort paused. "We are not villains, Harry. We do not kill without reason." His father walked to the door, which led to his private quarters. The door opened revealing a sparsely decorated room that contained no windows. Instead, it drew its light from a solitary fireplace that could not be used for Floo. "Come with me, Harry."

His feet carried into the room after his father. The Dark Lord opened the door to the cabinet that rested by a bed, revealing one of Harry's dagger sets. His father's slender skeleton like hand grasped the leather container and held it level with Harry's face.

“Dumbledore prides himself for not taking life, once he deems it worthy of life. He trusts in love. The esteemed headmaster deems me incapable of love, and as such there is no chance for my redemption. The only alternative is my death.” His father gazed at the daggers. “I, however, kill for the Wizarding World, in hopes of saving it from the corruption that flows through its veins. A corruption that Dumbledore and others seek to maintain.” He handed the daggers to Harry, and just as the youth was about to pull them away, Voldemort’s grip tightened. His red eyes bore into Harry. “I will tell you an ultimate truth that Dumbledore will never come to grasp because he can not see the flaws in love, Harry. Love can kill. If love can kill, then surely hate can save. We will save the Wizarding world with our hatred.”

The daggers were now freely in Harry’s hand. ‘If love can kill, then surely hate can save.’ His father’s words echoed through his mind. ‘Does it really work that way?’ Harry’s brow further creased.

“You look ill.” His father’s voice said quietly.

Harry eyes focused. “I am just tired.”

“Your room is ready for you.”

“Thank you.” Harry mumbled, fatigue finally winning over the adrenalin that had flowed through his veins earlier.

Voldemort watched on as his son left the room. His face set in a grim façade. His hand came to rest on the bed. His fingers toyed idly with the velvety fabric. His heart hardened as he did so. He knew that it must come before the end arrived. Gradually, he sat on the bed, eagerly accepting its support.

The door opened. Voldemort half expected to see Harry standing in the doorway. Instead, a still Bellatrix Lestrange stood. Her face was pinched. “My Lord.” She murmured as she bowed. “I hope you will forgive me this intrusion.”

By this time, Voldemort had risen once more. “Just this once, Bellatrix, and never again.”

Lestrange quickly nodded her head. “What do you think, my Lord?”

Voldemort turned his back to his servant. "The damage is done." Voldemort chuckled mirthlessly. "Dumbledore has shattered the boy more than even I could do."

"He will still fight with us?" Bellatrix prodded carefully.

Voldemort smiled. "He will follow me to the gates of hell, however-." His voice trailed off refusing to finish the sentence.

"But what?"

Voldemort peered over his shoulder at the woman. "At the beginning, Bellatrix, I warned you to not become attached to the boy. I warned us both. Yet we both did not heed that warning." Voldemort moved into the study. "At the end of this war, Harry will cease to exist."

"You will end his life after all he has done to serve you?" Bellatrix's voice rose threateningly.

The Dark Lord remained silent, as he gazed upon his books. "Did you not see it in his eyes, Bellatrix?"

Bellatrix looked mutely at her Lord.

"He is dieing, Bellatrix." Voldemort grasped a chair that was near him and flung it to the other side of the room. "I fashioned for myself a weapon. The perfect weapon, however, now I have seen its flaw. He is human... still an adolescent." He stared impassively at the broken chair. "Harry has never seen another side before now. He is naïve, because I have kept him that way." Voldemort peered down at his hands. "I have caused this."

Bellatrix frowned. "We never expected Dumbledore to get his hands on him."

"No, I never conceived Harry being placed in the fool's hands." Voldemort said as he vainly sought to relieve his pounding head by rubbing his temples. "Now because of Dumbledore's interference, Harry will slowly die inwardly, leaving only a shell." 'Dumbledore perfected my weapon,' Voldemort thought faintly. 'No, not perfected.'

“My Lord?”

“Leave me, Bellatrix.” He whispered.

Wordlessly, she did so. With effort Lestrangle closed the door, trying not to make a sound. For the most part she was successful. Effortlessly, Voldemort conjured a new chair and slumped into it. He was exhausted. However, he remained in the chair for hours, instead of returning to his room.

‘I intend to love him.’ The words echoed through his mind. When he had spoken them those many years ago, he had not meant them. He had never loved. People were just pawns... pawns with desires, emotions, and essence. One toddler had started out as such, however the child had etched himself onto Voldemort’s very soul. Voldemort sneered coldly. ‘You assume to know me, Dumbledore. Once you endeavored to save me, however you soon abandoned that attempt. I was beyond this concept you call love. Then how is it, fool, that I feel this emotion toward this adolescent I call my son?’ Leaning back into the chair, he sighed loudly. ‘I tried to deny it but now I know the truth... I would do anything to see my son’s eyes blaze with life once more.’

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## **Teaser**

“Severus, what I am about to ask you will possibly be the most dangerous assignment that I have ever given you, yet.” Dumbledore stated heavily.

Snape’s eyes narrowed in dread and anticipation.

“I need you to slip Wizard’s Bane into Voldemort’s drink, rendering him powerless.” Dumbledore gazed steadily at the potions professor. “If you are successful, we could possibly win the war.”

## Chapter Nineteen: When We Meet Again

Harry stretched as he lay in the confines of his bed. The silky fabric wrinkled with his movement, creating different shades of blue. His sleep encrusted mind beckoned for him to rise, however the downy surface begged his body to remain. Flipping on to his stomach he buried his head into the pillow. He had now been home for a week and had done little since his return other than rest. During these days, Harry had had little contact with anyone, opting instead to remain in his quarters or to practice solitarily in his personal training room. He had little want for companionship, especially when he saw the pity in their eyes.

Moaning, Harry roughly rolled onto his back once more. His eyes opened and rest on his wand hand. Impassively, he examined it, moving his fingers just to make sure he was still alive. Instead of life, Harry felt a penetrating cold that seemed to encompass his entire being. 'I can't remember what it felt like to feel warmth.' He thought with enthrallment. 'When did this happen? Oh, I remember... when I saw the end of the hallway.' Harry frowned. 'Does it really matter?'

His thoughts were interrupted by the sharp knock that resonated of his door. Rising from his bed, Harry called. "Come in."

His father entered, his head turning to examine the room and then finally Harry himself. "I think you have had enough lazing about."

"Is there a mission you would like me to complete?" Harry asked.

"No." Voldemort said holding his gaze. "It is time to further your training, especially if you desire to duel Dumbledore."

"You know?"

"Bellatrix has filled me in on your desire for vengeance." Voldemort grinned. "I was going to save him for myself, however I can not deny, you, your revenge. Show him no mercy, and I will not regret my decision. It does not matter in the overall picture who kills Dumbledore just as long as he dies. Once he is out of the way, the resistance will crumble. The Wizarding World is lacking in strong leaders. No one will come close to filling in his shoes."

Harry nodded. No matter how senile Dumbledore was, he was still a very charismatic leader and could easily sway the people to his cause. "Next time he crosses my path, he will die. You have my word."

"Then it will be done." Voldemort nodded. "You will not need your wand for this portion of your training."

"Wandless magic?" Harry asked astonished. "Before you said that it was not necessary for me to learn it."

"Times change, Harry. In this type of warfare, it will become extremely easy for one to become separated from their wand. And such a happening could easily leave you dead." Voldemort paused. "We will go to the east wing's training room after lunch. Its size will be suitable for our sparring session."

"Is there another reason you are teaching me this?"

"You were always too astute for your own good." Voldemort whispered. "In three weeks time, there will be a mission for you that will require the use of muggle weapons or wandless magic since the Ministry now knows your wand's signature. It should demoralize the enemy and draw out Dumbledore... much to your satisfaction, I believe?"

Harry's eyes widened. "A hit and run. Who is the target?"

"The Minister of Magic. You will do the preliminary assessment of the security that surrounds Fudge, since it will be your mission. You will also have your pick, concerning those that you wish to accompany you. However, they cannot bear the Dark Mark."

"This will be the most difficult mission that you have sent me on." Harry stated evenly.

His father slowly nodded his head. "You are the only one capable of completing this task, besides myself. I am too obvious for this mission. My presence would only serve to give the mission away."



"They know who I am now." Harry moved to his closet to select one of his many robes. Once he had selected a suitable black one, he paused to hear his father's response.

"That is true." Voldemort replied, his eyes staring into his son's back. "However, I have faith that you can complete this mission no matter the odds. You will find their weak spots and exploit them as you have always done."

Harry closed his eyes and bowed his head. Memories of his arrogance played in his mind. He had ignored an important rule when it came to his line of work. He had played with Black, exposing himself to Potter's attack. 'I am not invulnerable.' Harry's mind whispered silently. 'I do not fear death, thus I have seceded where most would not fare. But was this lack off fear what led me to defeat?'

"Harry," his father said as he closed the gap between them. His hand rested on his son's shoulder. It was largest display of affection his father would ever show, but it was enough for Harry. "Another coincidence like what occurred during your last mission will not happen again. I think you have learned more through your mistake, than I could have ever taught you."

"Hmph," Harry snorted. "I learned not to let it happen another time. I will die before I ever come under Dumbledore's control again."

Voldemort nodded. "You will succeed." His hand left his son's shoulder and he walked to the door. "You will be dining with me this afternoon. Be on time."

"Yes, father." When the door shut, Harry hurried himself through his morning routines.

" " "

Albus Dumbledore tiredly rubbed his temples as he sat in the ruins of his study. It had been a week since the assault on Hogwarts. The students had long since left, along with many members of the staff, except for Professor McGonagall who had volunteered her time to aid him. In that week, the Headmaster had cleared much of the rubble. However the message that had been etched on the wall behind him

could not be erased. 'Harry must have used a permanent sticking charm on it.' The headmaster mutely speculated to himself. 'You brought this on yourself, old man. We will meet again, and on that day you will die.' The words echoed through his mind as if Harry had been present to say them. He leaned back in the chair he had conjured. His mind drifted to when he had first entered his study that Friday.

Fawkes had immediately sought him out, knowing that his master was on mission to retrieve one of the final Horcruxes. He had been mostly successful in retrieving it without setting of the trap that had been attached to the cup that had once belonged Helga Hufflepuff. Having transfigured a rock into a cat, he had sent the creature to set off the protecting charm that destroyed the yellow cat. With the spell no longer intact, Dumbledore had triumphantly taken the cup. In his mind, he had gone over the list of Horcruxes, and was pleased to know that only two remained... Godric Gryffindor's pendant, which still hung around Harry's Potter's neck, and finally there was an item that had belonged to Rowena Ravenclaw, which was in a location that was still anonymous to the Headmaster. However, his moment of pleasure had been destroyed when Fawkes had arrived.

Unable to reach Hogwarts before Harry and the Death Eaters had fled, Dumbledore had instead sought to head them off at Knockturn Alley. It was a lucking guess on the aged Headmaster's part, and had paid off. However, in the end, he had failed, because of the slowness of the Ministry officials in raising an Anti-Apparation barrier, they had escaped.

Empty-handed, the Headmaster had returned to his school to be greeted with his terrified students. Much later, he went to his study to find it completely destroyed. His eyes had widened in surprise before they narrowed in anger. Harry was Riddle's son. This sadistic work proved it. Dumbledore could easily picture Tom Riddle having done it. Raising his wand, he had soaked his smoldering desk with water, causing the entire structure to collapse. In the ashes, he found a pair of black rimmed glasses that had been tarnished brown by the blaze. 'So here died Harry Potter before he even had a chance to live. And out of the ashes rose Harry Marvolo.' Dumbledore had thought with

irony. He grasped the fire damaged glasses and had stared at them for minutes. 'It is fitting that he died here.'

"Headmaster, you had wished to speak with me?" Severus Snape asked as he stared at the thinking Dumbledore.

"Yes, Severus." Dumbledore smiled briefly. "I was just lost in thought."

Snape nodded his head. "Many people are finding themselves lost in thought... it is much better than what we call reality."

Dumbledore nodded in agreement. "Especially now when all hope seems lost. We are losing this war, unless something is done. With Harry returned to Voldemort, we can expect the number of deaths to increase. They will attack us using two fronts... one led by Harry the other fully controlled by Voldemort."

Snape flinched at the use of the Dark Lord's name. "It does appear to be a bleak scenario."

The Headmaster's face appeared to grow pallor and pinched. "Severus, what I am about to ask you, will possibly be the most dangerous assignment that I have ever given you." Dumbledore stated heavily.

Snape's eyes narrowed in dread and anticipation.

"I need you to slip Wizard's Bane into Voldemort's drink, rendering him powerless." Dumbledore gazed steadily at the potions professor. "If you are successful, we could possibly win the war."

"That is an impossible task." Snape sputtered, which was quite an achievement since he was always so collected. "It can not be done. The Dark Lord would know! In the end, after being tortured for information, he would kill me."

"I know it is risky-."

"It is my life that you are risking, Albus!" Snape hissed from where he stood. He was half tempted to leave the room.

“Severus, this could stop the killing.”

Snape chuckled. “I am human, Albus, and as such I am selfish. What good is an end to this hell, if I am not here to enjoy it? I prefer not to rush into a situation that can get me killed when there are other options.”

Dumbledore sighed. “Is there a way to disguise the potion so Voldemort will be unaware of its presence?”

“Perhaps.” Severus said reluctantly. “But there is no way to know for sure if it will work.”

“We have to try it.”

Snape frowned as he return the Headmaster’s intense gaze. Inwardly, he fought a smile that was threatening to show on his face. “I will do it.”

“Thank you, Severus. This means a lot to me and the Wizarding World.”

‘I bet it does.’ Severus thought as he bid his employer goodbye and began his walk to his classroom. “But it does not matter.” The potion master whispered once he was safely in his office. “After this, Albus, whatever debt I feel I must pay to you will finally be made null. No matter was the outcome, whether I fail or succeed, I will not be returning to yours or Voldemort’s side.” Snape smiled slightly as he played with a portkey that he had hidden in his pocket. It would serve as his escape as the Potions Master had specifically made it to break through the ward that surrounded the Dark Lord’s fortress. “I will have my freedom.”

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Harry dodged yet another one of his father’s attacks, panting with exertion. His feet landed on the floor, however the landing was not smooth enough, and Harry was forced to use his hands for balance. Wearily, he raised his eyes to examine his father’s face, looking for signs of disappointment. Instead, he watched as another spell was hurtled at him. Using both his hands and feet for thrust, he hurled his

body away from the purple light. This time he was unable to land on his feet and came crashing to the ground on his side. The air escaped his lungs. Ragged coughs shook Harry's body. When his cough fit finally ended, and Harry was able to see properly, he was surprised to see his father offering him his hand. Gratefully, he accepted his father's help to his feet.

"What is the object of this lesson?" His father asked patiently.

"To teach me how to properly perform wandless magic." Harry answered stiffly as he wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

Red eyes closed. "That is peculiar, because I was beginning to believe that we were heightening your ability to evade attacks."

"I try-."

His father laughed snidely at this. "I see no try. I see you abandoning your position time and time again! You will stay and fight me. If you leave your position to avoid one of my spells once more, Harry, there will be punishment."

Harry's face became lined with concentration. "I understand."

Voldemort smiled as he returned to his place. Once there, he turned to face his young ward. He was greeted by a face that held fierce determination. "Let's begin!" Even as he finished his sentence, the Dark Lord began to fire his spell. To his son's credit, he did not try to dodge the spell. However Harry was still unable to create a barrier, so the spell knocked him backwards. "Stand up!"

Reluctantly, Harry rose to his feet. His ribs ached after the direct hit. 'Try to imagine the barrier forming between you and the spell.' Harry told himself as he prepared for the inevitable attack. The assault came only this time something was different. Harry could actually feel the magic surrounding him. He was able to manipulate it to do his will. A resounding sound greeted both combatants' ears as the spell bounced off a barrier and hit the wall behind Voldemort.

"Well done, Harry." The Dark Lord paused. "Now we can make progress. Any spell can be created just as you did with the barrier."

However, certain spells such as the Avada Kedavra tend to lack potency when performed with wandless magic. Each branch of magic has their advantages and their disadvantages.”

Harry fought back the smile when he heard his father say a line that he had often repeated to Harry during lessons. “I remember.”

Voldemort’s lips twitched. “I suppose you do. In that case, let the lesson continue. This time you will attack me. The Unforgivable Curses can not be used.”

Harry nodded and began to picture the jelly leg curse.

“Begin!” His father shouted.

Grasping the magic around him, Harry sent his curse. To his surprise, the spell did not reach his father but vanished. Before he had time to react by establishing a shield, his father shot a stunning spell in his direction. Remembering, his father’s early instructions he did not dodge. Harry felt his body go rigid until he completely toppled over, causing Harry to land on his stomach, smashing his nose in the process. The spell lifted, and Harry immediately moved to halt his nose from bleeding, however was unable to staunch the bleeding.

“Here.” Voldemort said as he used a healing spell to heal his son’s damaged nose.

“My Lord.” Bellatrix voice carried in the sparse room. “Snape is here. He says he has important information concerning Dumbledore’s movements.”

“He can tell me this news over dinner.” Voldemort turned to Harry. “We have done enough for today. We have three weeks. I believe that will be sufficient enough time for you to grasp the main concepts. Shower and you will join me and Severus at lunch.’

“Bellatrix, you are to join us as well.”

Bellatrix bowed. “Of course, my Lord.”

The Dark Lord began to leave when, Harry stopped him. "Father, I do not trust Snape."

"Neither do I." Voldemort stated. "That is why Bellatrix and you will be joining me."

Harry's disquiet was not relieved.

""

The house elves brought out the food, followed by red wine that had already been poured into individual crystal stemmed glasses. Harry was not surprise to see that Snape was jumpy and somewhat reluctant to eat the food that filled his plate. 'He's done something.' Harry knew beyond a doubt. Looking at his father, who was sitting beside him, Harry was surprised to see his father completely unconcerned. Disappointed, Harry returned to the task of eating. The house elves had truly outdone themselves this evening. The sirloin was cooked to perfect along with the many sides that varied in taste.

Harry only paused in his examining of the food when he noticed his father twirling his wine glass. It was a gesture that his father did often, but his time it was different.

Voldemort held the glass to his nose sniffing its burgundy contents. "A wine of good vintage is always a treat to find. This one has a delectable smell." He stated as he continue to make the liquid spin around the rounded glass walls. "The way it flows is also a good testament to the winery that created it. Don't you agree, Severus?"

The spy curtly nodded his head. "Yes, my Lord. You are correct. It is exquisite wine."

The Dark Lord absently nodded. He seemed completely engrossed with the wine. "It is fitting that it is red wine." He moved to sip the contents but halted. His eyes finally rested on Snape. "Why do you look so pale, Snape? Are you ill?"

"No, my Lord."

Voldemort rested the cup onto the wood surface of the table. "How did you get it into my cup?"

"I do not know what you mean, my Lord."

The Dark Lord smiled his gaze returning to the wine. "If only all betrayals tasted as good as a high-quality wine." With that he brushed the glass off the table and onto the floor. The shards of glass mingled with claret pool. "Now, Snape, how did you manage to get the Wizard's Bane into my glass? I hate to see such excellent wine go to waste."

"I tricked the house elves into doing so."

"Cunning." Voldemort stated. "Unfortunately, after this I can no longer allow you to live. One betrayal deserves another."

Snape looked into the red eyes. "After this I intend to serve one person... myself. My Lord, you and Dumbledore will fight this war. I, however, refuse to be caught in the middle." Snape's hand grasped the portkey in his pocket and disappeared. Harry's dagger connected with thin air.

"Greasy bastard." Harry shouted.

Bellatrix turned to Voldemort. "How did you know?"

Voldemort took on a look of reflection. "Some would call me a connoisseur of wine. The smell was slightly off. There is no doubt in my mind that he tried to conceal the Wizard's Bane. However, my sense of smell is greater than a human's."

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The brick surface of the London townhouse served as the perfect backrest. Replacing his newspaper back into his backpack, Harry began to move. The three days that he had been observing Fudge had proved rather uneventful. Walking past the guarded townhouse, which currently held the Minister of Magic, Harry was suddenly grateful for such simple charms such as the Glamour Charm. Brushing locks of brown hair from his now gray eyes, Harry gazed at



the house. The Auror's watched him unsuspectingly. Harry smiled and waved in their direction. Only one of them returned his wave.

Once passed the townhouse, Harry turned the corner onto a bustling street. He smiled dully as he recalled one truth that he had learned during the years he had spent in his father's service. 'They never suspect the child. And when they realize the truth most can not kill the child, thus they die.'

Arriving at his next road, he left the street he was currently on behind. Raising his eyes from the sidewalk, Harry saw the park in the distance. A cool fall breeze caused his hair to blow into his eyes. The selected bench came into sight. Removing his paper from his bag once more, Harry sat down. Minutes later, Harry heard another person sit beside him.

"On your side?" Harry asked.

The black-haired sixteen year old smirked. "Surprisingly open."

"Hmm." Harry mumbled. "Appearances can be deceiving. Just like how there were only two guards protecting the front."

"There has to be more."

Harry smiled. "When something looks too good to be true, it is probably not. That is a main lesson to be learned in this business, Draco." Harry paused. "The windows give away their numbers. I would estimate thirty guards, varying throughout the four stories. What makes this job so difficult is the proximity to the Ministry of Magic. Reinforcements can easily be called at the first sign of a disturbance."

"How does the Dark Lord expect us to carry this out?" Sarcasm dripped in his friend's voice.

"He expects it to be carried out well." Harry made sure Draco got the full impact of his sentence. "This mission will not call for numbers, Draco, just finesse. Besides, I have a layout of the house."

“How did you manage to get your hands on that?” The normal blonde youth asked incredulously.

“Everyone has their price.” Harry replied briskly. “Now, Fudge’s office is on the fourth floor, putting all the Aurors between him and us. The front door is of course off limits, and the two guards have to remain at their posts during this whole operation or our cover will be blown. What I propose to do is enter through the third story window, which is located in the east alley. It is out of sight. The only problem is that there are three Aurors. If one of them is able to shoot a warning from their wand, we fail.”

“What am I going to be doing during this?”

“You will be watching for Ministry reinforcements in a building across the street and catty-corner of the target’s home. From there you keep me alert to the movements both inside and outside the house.”

“So you’re taking all the action?”

Harry’s eye brow rose. “You want to go into a house infested with Aurors?”

“On second thought, Marvolo, they are all yours.”

Harry smiled. “The next tricky part is the time of day I plan to carry out this assignment. Fudge, rushes home briefly everyday at noon. During this period of time his guard count is lower, however we also have a smaller window of time to get in and get out. I will also be more visible. However, if we are successful it will send the desired message to the Wizarding World, especially since we will have done it in broad daylight.”

“This is insane!”

Harry snorted. “Insanity and brilliance are often mistaken for the other.”

“If things go wrong?”

Harry reached into his backpack. "This, my friend, is a muggle headset used for communication. Because Wizards do not have a full understanding of primitive muggle devices, they will be unable to listen in on our conversations. If the Ministry would arrive you would alert me... and then use this portkey to escape to my safe house. You, press this button and the portkey will work immediately."

"And will you have another such portkey?" Draco asked. His eyes had narrowed.

"Yes, however, my retreat will not be as simple." Harry sighed. "There are wards over the house that prevents portkeys from functioning. I will have to work my way out and then use the portkey."

"There is a lot of risk." Draco said still unimpressed by Harry's plan.

"For success, there has to be risk. Besides if we came during the night the increased number of guards would hinder my progress."

Leaning forward in the bench, Draco looked at his friend from the corner of his eyes. "When?"

"This Thursday."

Draco's now hazel eyes widened. "This Thursday? As in tomorrow? Doesn't that cut our preparation time?"

"I have everything I need." Harry stated. "Remember, Draco, you cannot use your wand. If everything goes well you shouldn't have to. Keep the headset on all the time. This switch, here, turns it on."

"I got it."

Using his hands to help lift his body, Harry stood. "See you tomorrow."

Draco nodded. "This had better work, Marvolo. I am not taking the Dark Lord's wrath if something happens to you."

"Nothing is going to happen to me... I could never be a grain of wheat."

“What?”

Harry smiled forlornly. “Nothing.” He, then, left an exceedingly perplexed Draco Malfoy.

“”””

‘One, Two, Three... go.’ Harry’s mind echoed. His heart remained steady as he moved effortlessly through the back alley that lay behind the Townhouse. In the foreground he could hear the Aurors talking idly amongst themselves. Hiding behind a trash bin, Harry waited counting their movements. ‘Three... just as planed.’ The sound of footsteps reached his ears. They were coming his way. Using wandless magic, he created a soft noise that lured the guards in the opposite direction.

“What was that?”

“I don’t-.” The third was cut off as a dagger severed his spinal cord. His body collapsed to the concrete.

Harry’s youthful body was already into action before the man hit the ground. The second dagger in his hand stuck in the first Auror’s forehead. His hands empty, Harry used his hands to disable the last. His breaths were heavier but controlled. He had completed his first task with little sound. Looking at the third story window, Harry created a robe that led up to it. His hands firmly grasped the thin rope, and he began his ascent.

The window was unlocked, making the second task easy. With the use of his hands, Harry pulled himself into the townhouse.

“I’m in.” He whispered in the headset.

“Copy... The guards are still in place.”

Harry made no reply. Instead, he moved stealthily down the wallpapered hallway, which was decorated with all manner of luxury items. Around the corner, he heard an Auror’s footsteps. Leaning against the wall, Harry waited patiently for him to pass. As the man did, Harry removed a dagger and came in from behind. The Auror

struggled briefly as his blood trickled from his body. Taking the limp body, Harry removed it from the main hallway.

Continuing, Harry arrived at the stair that led to the lower floors. Using wandless magic, he soundlessly sealed the stairs. 'That should keep them for a time.' He mused. His feet moved rapidly as he cleared the next flight of stairs. 'Almost there.'

"Who are you?" A voice from the top of the stairs called. "What the hell!"

Harry sent a bright green light at the man. However it did not meet its intended target. Instead, it smashed harmlessly into the wall.

'Damn it!'

Harry barreled up the stairs. Removing a dagger, he swung out into the center of the stairway. Throwing the dagger sharply around the corner, Harry was gratified to hear the sound of the man's body collapsing. Once around the corner, he saw the man gasping for breath with the dagger sticking out from his chest. It had probably punctured a lung.

"Don't worry, you won't have to suffer long." Harry whispered.

"Step away from him!" A woman's voice called. Her wand directed at Harry's heart.

"Fire." Harry challenged her.

A sparkle of orange light left her wand. Creating a shield, Harry sent the light harmless to his left. In return, Harry sent a powerful banishing charm. The woman and her bubblegum colored hair went sailing into the wall behind her, rendering her unconscious. Now that she was out of the way, Harry removed his dagger from the man who had appeared to have died during the course of his fight with the woman he knew as Tonks.

"I'm on the fourth floor." Harry hissed into the microphone. "I ran into some problems up here."

“Nothing happening so far down here.” Draco’s voice asked, crackling slightly do to interference.

‘Amazing,’ Harry thought quietly. “Next room is Fudge’s.”

“Good luck.”

“Thanks.”

Opening the door, Harry was greeted by the sight of two aurors there wand trained on him.

“Mr. Potter,” Fudge’s voice called from where he was sitting behind his desk. “I do believe you have an appointment at Azkaban.”

Harry smiled, bowing his head. “Not yet.”

Sending a banishing charm, Harry hit one of the guards sending him into a wall in the same manner that Tonks had. The second misfired his spell, giving Harry time to dispatch him with one of his daggers. Fluently, Harry sent another dagger at the other.

“Oh, my god.” Fudge stuttered as he sat petrified.

“No that they are out of the way we can get down to business.” Harry stated briskly. “First I want you to sign a reprieve in the Dorian Potter case.”

“What?” Fudge’s face turned a bright shade of scarlet. “That little brat helped a monster like you to escape!”

Harry grinned. “You are an idiot to think that I would need or ever want his aid.”

“Then why have me sign a reprieve.”

“I am a big fan of justice.” Harry whispered. “Some would say that I am justice’s hands.”

Fudge’s eyes narrowed even as he reached into his desk for paper. “What do you think you are? Some dark prince?”

"You fashion me a prince?" Harry laughed. "Princes, princesses, kings, and queens," he murmured as Fudge looked on in terror having just finished signing the reprieve. Harry brushed his bangs from his eyes as he lifted his face, giving the Minister an unobstructed view of his countenance. "They all had their chances to rule, however they fell, either to sword or time. They were replaced by revolutionaries and dictators.'

"You, Fudge, are a monarchist long passed your days of glory. Consider my father a revolutionary." The corners of Harry's lips twitched. "If history is any indicator, he will become a dictator, and this conflict will spread, until he is a Dark Lord.'

"So you see, Fudge? I am neither a prince for I am not weak like one, nor am I a revolutionary, because I have no secret agenda." Harry reached into his robes and removed a gleaming dagger. "I am simply Voldemort's son."

Harry's hand released the dagger with a flick of his wrist, landing it in Fudge's throat. Blood trickled down the contours of the man's neck even as he blinked in surprise. The Minister of Magic's head landed on his desk as life left him. Harry did not pause in leaving. After all, he had killed two birds with one stone.

As he began to leave the office, Draco's voice came cracking over the electronic headset. "Reinforcements... on their way... lots of them... trigger ward?"

"Damn interference," Harry hissed as he ran full speed down the hallway. Pushing his back against the nearest wall, he carefully inched his way to the window. Partially pulling the edge of the drape from the glass, Harry took a brief look at his opposition. "Fuck."

## Chapter Twenty: Safe House

*Previously...* “Damn interference,” Harry hissed as he ran full speed down the hallway. Pushing his back against the nearest wall, he carefully inched his way to the window. Partially pulling the edge of the drape from the glass, Harry took a brief look at his opposition. “Fuck.”

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Glass sprayed Harry's body even as he ducked for cover. The window that he had been peering was now spread across the floor and Harry's back. His left cheek and hands stung from where pieces of glass had hit him. Pushing himself up, allowing the glass to simply fall off his body, Harry continued down the hallway in a crutched position. ‘Think, Marvolo.... Think!’ Harry's mind screamed. ‘The barrier I placed on the stairs is not going to last much longer. If there is someone of experience downstairs, it will be gone even sooner.’ Now that he was passed the row of windows, Harry could move faster. Rising to his full height, Harry bolted toward the fourth story window that faced west. ‘I'll be a moving target at least.’ He thought hurriedly before he smashed the window.

A rope suddenly cleared the distance between Harry and the next house. With a grimace spread across his face, he grasped the loose end and positioned himself in the window frame. Holding his breath, Harry swung from the former Minister of Magic's townhouse. In midair, Harry flung his feet in front of himself, preparing his body for the eminent collision with the third story window of the next house. He largely ignored the spells that were thrown in his direction by the Aurors below. The sound of breaking glass became deafening to him. Pain filled Harry as portions of the window cut into his unprotected flesh. Unable to hold on to the rope, Harry landed on his side, hitting the wood floor of the house hard. His body slid a far distance down the hall before inertia halted his motion. Rising shakily, he moved quickly to a fire escape door. Throughout his run, his bruised side screeched in pain.

‘My timing has to be perfect.’ He thought, throwing the door open. Casting a time slowing charm, Harry jumped from the fire escape



stairs, landing smoothly on the cobblestone below. Not far off, he could hear their voices shouting out commands. His feet immediately started to run once more. He easily maneuvered down the narrow maze of alley streets. His breath becoming ragged, Harry knew that it would not be long before his pursuers caught up with him. He skidded to a halt when he suddenly realized that he was currently in the section of London that had been for all purposes destroyed by his father's rampage. Abandoned houses would serve as the perfect hiding place, but first he had something to check before he wasted time. Removing his portkey, he touched the button that under normal circumstances would have transported him to his safe house, however, this time nothing happened. 'They must have expanded the range of the barrier... hopefully, Draco got out immediately.'

His eyes roamed over the desolate street that lay before him before they landed on a charred blue house. It would serve as a good hiding place. As he entered through the door frame, he was taken aback at how much it appeared to be a ghost house. Though its exterior was now charred, the heart of the house remained unchanged by time. Items were left where their owners had placed them before they either abandoned their home, or had been killed. Harry's eyes fell onto a moving family portrait that revealed that the home had been owned by a Wizarding family. His trembling hands sore from the glass cuts and rope burn gripped the delicate silver frame, bringing the picture closer to his face.

"The girl I saw..." Harry's voice trailed off. His finger touched her beaming face.

"He couldn't have gotten far." A voice shouted. "Fan out."

Harry looked sadly down at the picture one more time, before placing it face down on the table. Silently, he receded further into the bowels house.

""""

"He's insane!" Sirius Black stated in disbelief after witnessing his partner's eldest son dive into the third story window of the house neighboring Fudge's.

James's face was extremely pale as he watched speechlessly. If he had desired to comment, the words just would not have come.

"Cover the perimeter!" Albus Dumbledore shouted. "Secure the Minister!"

James frowned as he along with Sirius moved into the townhouse. Once they reached the third floor staircase. They and their counterparts were met with an interesting dilemma that was preventing them from reaching the minister.

"What do we have?" James asked upon arrival.

One of the junior Aurors, Thomas... at least James thought that was his name answered. "We have a barrier, sir."

"Sirius, show them how it is done." James said caustically.

With a brief flick of his wand, Sirius dissipated the magical barrier much to the distain of those who had been working on it for the past fifteen minutes. Not waiting for any more words from the newbies, James and Sirius continued up the stairs. On the fourth floor, they were taken aback when at the sight of two bodies that were recognizable two of their colleagues.

"Tonks!" Sirius shouted even as he rushed to his cousin's side. His shaking fingers rested under her chin, searching for a pulse. "She's alive!"

James nodded. "I'll check on the Minister." However, James was certain he knew what he would see when he entered the Minister's office. His guess was right one. His face became grim. In the many years of tracing Voldemort's assassin, James had almost become numb to this sight. Except now, he knew it was his son's work. Gently, he lifted Fudge from his desk, laying him on his back on the floor. The dagger protruding from the man's throat was all James needed to see. 'He did not stand a chance.'

Looking up from the corpse, James saw Sirius watching him from the doorway. A curt nod was all James needed to do to confirm his best

friend's suspicion. "Lets go... there is nothing we can do for the dead."

"Mate, I just want you to know that I am there for you." Sirius stated bluntly. "Harry was... is my godson. I know that I have not been receptive when he was figuratively brought back from the dead. But that day we watched him fly... we saw him without his mask on... it got me to thinking."

"Thank you, Padfoot." James closed his eyes, fighting back tears of frustration. "It is hard to just leave things the way they are... but it is all up to Harry."

Sirius nodded his head briefly as the pair left the room. "This is not going to be the ending we thought Harry would have when we held him just after his birth. I know you know this already, James, but you need to prepare yourself. This is not going to be one of those happy endings."

"Life doesn't have happy endings, Padfoot." James retorted briskly. "I am more concerned for Lily and Dorian."

Sirius Black frowned. It hurt him to watch the Potters suffer, especially when he saw no end to it. 'I want to say it is going to be alright... and crack a joke, but I can't.'

"Don't look so sour, Sirius." James said, moving down the staircase. As he walked past the new recruits, he paused. "Get body bags up there. The Minister is dead. Tonks is in need of medical attention. See that she gets it."

"Yes, sir."

Turning back to Sirius, James said. "We should report this to Dumbledore."

Sirius frowned. "Perhaps, you should let me do the talking... remember your last conversation with him."

"Deal." James said, recalling the shouting match he and the Headmaster had had when James had returned to active duty. That

conversation had ended nowhere, and had officially created a perpetual rift between Dumbledore and the Potter family. After it, James had been almost resigned his post as an Auror. If it had not been for the threat of Voldemort, he would have.

Once outside of the house, Sirius pulled aside the first Auror he saw. "Where's Dumbledore?"

"He and Moody went to capture the assassin. I guess they have him trapped in the old burned down section of town." The man stated. "So, Fudge is dead?"

"Yes." Sirius stated, walking away. Out of the corner, he watched as his partner fell into step with him. "What is going through your mind?"

"We have to get to Harry before they do."

""

The sound of creaking floorboards echoed morosely with every step Harry took. In the back of his mind, he was slightly concerned about the condemned building's ability to support his weight. However, if he was having second thoughts it was likely that the Aurors would also. The floor behind him groaned loudly, causing Harry to freeze. His eyes sought his follower even as he sent a spell in their direction. The sound of an object breaking reached his ears. His face turned quickly to peer over his shoulder. Harry's mouth parted, as he watched shimmering shards, which had once been a mirror fall to the ground, creating more pieces to a puzzle. In each shard, he saw a reflection of himself. After a few moment of pause, Harry reached the conclusion that the noise had not come from a human but rather the house itself.

Moving slowly over the pieces, Harry looked up at the frame that held only one piece. In it rested a flawless reflection of the right side of Harry's face. A smile slowly touched the youth's face as he examined the partial depiction of his complexion.

"I am killing myself." He whispered, quietly as he touched the smooth surface. "I am killing myself, yet I do not care." Removing his fingers,

Harry continued his walk through the hallway. "The glass was cold." Harry whispered, voicing his final contemplation aloud.

Through the worn walls, Harry could hear the voices of the frantic Aurors, looking for any trace of him. One such voice mentioned something about demolishing the buildings. Moving into a side room, Harry pressed his ear up to the drywall and strained to hear their conversation, which proved to be short lived and useless. Frowning, Harry rested his back against the wall and began to wait for the Ministry to make its first move.

A sniffing sound emitted from the corner, breaking Harry's concentration. Hesitantly, Harry left his perching spot and walked to the sofa. Bending, he lifted the skirt that hid the emptiness, which lay between the sofa and the carpeted floor. Two silvery eyes peered back at him out of fear.

"Pl-please don't kill me!" A boy's voice whimpered, trembling with fear.

Harry's eyes widened slightly, but betrayed none of his emotions. "Only if you do not try to kill me."

The child remained silent in his hiding spot.

Harry returned to his full height determined to ignore his unexpected companion. Wordlessly, he returned to his former position next to the far wall.

"How can I kill you, I'm only five and a half?" The boy asked.

His sudden response to Harry's statement dumbfounded the older boy. His emerald eyes narrowed at the memories the boy's simplistic statement had caused to rise. "You would be surprise, kid." Harry retorted quiet enough that he was confident the boy would not hear.

The booming sound of a building being collapsed caused Harry's stomach to turn with loathing. 'I will not be taken again.' The sound of a spell hitting nearby was too close for Harry's comfort. The sobs of the boy made him sigh vocally.

"What is your name?" Harry asked the sofa.

“Jonas.”

Harry closed his eyes. “A dove.”

The boy from beneath the sofa finally left his hiding spot. His hair was the color of freshly cut wheat and appeared to have not been trimmed in quite awhile. His silver colored eyes seemed oddly out of place when compared to the rest of his shallow face. His clothes were in shambles and fit him badly. Recently, the boy had probably gone through a rapid weight drop. It shown with the loose skin that hung from his limbs.

“What did you say?” Jonas asked. His face tightly lined with fear, as he stood trembling before Harry.

“Jonas... it is Greek for ‘dove’.” Harry whispered, grasping his fifth remaining dagger. “Do you live here by yourself?”

“I lived here with my family. They did not come back after You-Know-Who came.” The boy bit his lower lip in apprehension.

“I see.” Harry said in a hushed voice. “Why do you remain here?”

“I didn’t-.” Jonas halted as the sound of yet another building falling to the ground. “I didn’t want to go to an orphanage.”

Harry’s face took on a look of deep reflection. “My father was raised in an orphanage. He did not like it very much.”

Jonas stared silently at Harry. “You’re You Know Who’s son. Though I don’t know your name.”

A smile crept onto his face, turning away from the child, he stated, “My name is Harry. I’m not surprise that you have heard of me before. They have been spreading my exploits and appearance since my escape.”

The boy looked down at his shoes. “I’m sorry.”

‘Sorry?’ Harry pondered quietly, before the sound of an incoming spell wrenched his thoughts away. Harry flung himself on to Jonas

just as a spell hit their building, causing plaster to fall from the ceiling. "Bastards," Harry muttered, grasping Jonas's thin wrist. Tugging the boy along with him, Harry moved toward the back of the fragile house. Behind him, Harry could hear the walls buckle and collapse. Next to him the five year old was crying in fear. His tiny feet could not keep up with Harry's much bigger steps. Seeing no other solution, Harry swung the boy onto his back. "Hold on and keep your head down!"

Another spell hit the badly decayed house, erasing evidence of the family that had once called the place home. The ceiling before Harry slowly began to cave in. Raising his hand, Harry forced it to remain in place until they had safely passed beneath it.

"Turn left down the next hall." Jonas stated.

Harry immediately obeyed, turning sharply down the specified hallway. His side began to pain him with every ragged breath he drew. Tears began to cloud his vision as he raced to the back door. There was no doubt in his mind that it would be guarded by Auror guards. With Jonas on his back, he had a handicap. His hand grasped the loose golden door knob. Turning it, he was given access to the outside world. However, the sight that greeted him was anything but pleasant.

"Resorting to taking hostages are we, Potter." Moody's grating voice caused the hair on the back of Harry's neck to rise. "That is a new low, even for you."

Harry bowed his head. From beneath his bangs, his eyes roamed counting the circle of Aurors. Their numbers were not impressive, but they had Moody. The Head of the Aurors had to be worth at least five aurors. The other five Aurors were merely pests, yet they had to be taken out before he even thought of terminating Moody.

"Put the boy down, Potter."

'I intended to.' Harry thought snidely. Slowly, he lowered the frightened child to the ground. "Close your eyes." He whispered to Jonas at the last moment.

When Jonas's silvery orbs tightly closed, Harry released the dagger in his right hand, hitting the Auror directly to his left. In rapid session, Harry flung his fourth and third dagger. After the surprise had waxed, Moody and the remaining two Aurors had immediately sought cover. The spells came rapidly at Harry. He had only two remaining daggers. Out of the corner of his eyes, Harry watched as one of the Auror's left his position. The man did not move fast enough, and one of Harry's remaining daggers connected with his temple. Without looking, he tossed his finally dagger to the right. A satisfactory gulping noise told him he had found the other pest.

Harry hesitated too long and found himself tossed back into the house. He felt his left side light in fire from the pain. The intensity almost caused him to loss consciousness. However, his sheer determination prevented such an occurrence from happening. Instead, he accepted the pain, even when he fell heavily to the ground. His body shook as a coughing spasm overtook him. Numbly, Harry felt his lips become moist. Raising his hand, he wiped the liquid from his lips. His hand came back covered in blood. 'My ribs must have been broken.'

"You can't go on, Potter." Moody said, as he loomed over Harry's now still body. "It hurts doesn't it? Death does hurt... slowly it rips one's soul from the body, leaving nothing more then an empty shell. It is a fate most fitting for you... to feel what your victims have felt."

Harry smiled, revealing his crimson stained teeth. "I'm not dieing yet Moody. A few broken ribs cannot stop me from leaving his hell."

"In that case, it is nighty night for you... and in the morning you will truly have seen hell."

To Harry's horror, Jonas came to stand between him and Moody.

"Stand down, boy."

"Please, don't hurt him."

Moody's face constricted into one of rage. Without out further warning, the old Auror roughly pushed the child out of his path. Harry heard Jonas's uttered gasp of pain when he soundly hit the pavement, his



tears filling the back alley. Those tears spurred Harry into action. Hoisting himself onto his knees, Harry crawled quickly falling onto the corpse of one of his victims. His pale hands held tightly onto the dagger that had entered the man's heart.

"Get your filthy hands off him."

Harry wretched again, coughing more blood. "Gladly," he hissed.

Moody staggered backwards, dropping his wand. A silver dagger protruded from his stomach. Groggily, Harry forced himself to stand. His whole body wavered as he walked toward the downed Auror, threatening to cave. He paused carefully knelling down to examine Jonas, who's body shook with sobs as he held his sprained wrist. Staring coldly at Moody, Harry removed a dagger from another corpse. When he was directly in front of the head Auror he fell to his knees so that he and the older man could look directly into each other's eyes.

"You are right about one thing, Moody. My hands are blackened." His voice shook as he tried to stop the coughs. "No matter how many times I wash them, I cannot clean them." More blood entered his mouth. "In the end, more blood blackens them further."

Moody grasped the dagger that was lodged in his stomach. The blood oozed between his clenched fingers. His eyes wide as he looked at Harry's gaunt face. 'A child born of death... naïve, scared, lethal and ultimately doomed.'

"I wouldn't remove it if I were you, Moody. A stomach wound is a slow and horrible way to die... very painful. I would imagine that you would live longer with the dagger in."

Moody eyes began to glaze. "You won't survive this... spawn of Voldemort."

Harry closed his eyes when he thrust the second dagger into the ground. "I do not wish to survive this, Moody. I tasted the fruit... I have seen the different shades of gray, and it is killing me. I cannot get these spots off my hands!"

“Why not kill yourself!” Moody shouted.

“My father still needs me.” Harry hissed, rising painfully to his feet. “I will let you live only to tell Dumbledore that I am waiting for him. He will know how to find me.”

“How?”

Harry turned his back on Moody. “Come, Jonas. We’re leaving.”

“Kid, don’t follow him.” Moody shouted even as he shook with pain. “Only death follows him.”

Grasping his hurt wrist, Jonas only spared Moody one glance, before chasing after Harry. The two walked in silence not wishing to draw the spread Aurors’ attention. Harry knew that it would not take them long to discover Moody. Several blocks passed without incident before Harry finally paused. His hand entered his inner pocket.

“Hold onto my hand.” Harry ordered the boy. From the interior of his robes, he removed the portkey. “I doubt their barrier goes this far.”

Harry felt the familiar pull of the portkey. Once again he was reminded of why he hated to use them. The contents of his stomach moved uneasily until he hit a hard wood floor. The landing was anything but perfect. Harry landed on his one good side, while his companion was thrown off to the side.

“Marvolo?” Draco’s concerned voice cut through the blinding pain Harry felt. “Are you alright?”

‘Moron.’ Harry thought just before another coughing fit claimed his body. In the background, he heard his friend gasp in surprise. He felt Draco’s arms wrap around him, helping him into a straighter position. “Draco, get my wand.” His friend immediately obeyed. Once the wand was in his hand, Harry set to work on mending his ribs. A harsh moan escaped his lips when he set the first rib back into its place. Panting, Harry shook in pain.

“How many did you break?” Draco asked. His face was seriously drawn.

Harry ignored the question. Instead, he repaired the punctured lung and drained it of blood. Calmly, Harry used his wand to search for other fractured ribs. He found only one more and quickly replaced it to its normal position.

“Done.” He whispered, leaning wearily back into the wall. He welcomed its firm support of his throbbing body.

“Marvolo, who’s the kid?”

“I will explain later, Draco.” Harry paused resting his head. “Jonas, come here, and I will fix your wrist.”

The despondent child immediately came forward. His hurt arm in front of him, Jonas waited patiently. Gradually, the pain lessened as Harry moved the tip of his wand across the injured bone.

“Find a place to sit, while I talk with my friend.” Harry said offhandedly.

Draco’s face expression was priceless. If it had been another time... a different Harry, he would have immediately jumped on this chance to make fun of his friend.

“We’re going to have guests, Draco. Dumbledore will trace the portkey to this place.” Harry looked at a silver instrument that sat on an oak table. “They are already manipulating the wards. We can’t get out using Floo or by Apparation, and the portkey is worthless since it only leads to here.”

“How do we escape?”

Harry smiled. It was a smile that was reminiscent of Bellatrix Lestrange. The smile plainly stated that people were going to die. “We don’t escape.”

“We can’t fight the entire Ministry!”

“The entire Ministry is not going to be coming. It will only be Dumbledore and a hand full of others.” Harry stated firmly.

“How do you know?” Draco shouted angrily. “I do not want my life to end at some last stand-.”

A snort cut Draco off before he truly began. “Last stands are stupid. I, too, will not die in such a manner.” Harry hissed. “This will be Dumbledore’s last stand.”

“You are in no condition to fight him.” Draco stated firmly. “Marvolo, your body cannot take anymore.”

“I will be fine. I have potions around here that will heal me.” Walking across the sparsely furnished room, Harry walked to a cabinet. From it, he removed a green vial. He swallowed the contents after Draco followed him.

“What’s up with the kid?” His friend asked in a hush voice, pointing over his shoulder at Jonas who sat swinging his legs to and fro from where he sat.

Harry replaced the vial. He knew what he was going to say would only confuse Malfoy, but he got a certain enjoyment in doing so to his friend. “He’s a bird.”

“He’s a what?”

Harry smiled wistfully. “He’s my bird.”

Draco looked at him as if he were cracked. “He’s not a bird.”

“I know.” Harry paused. “It was meant figuratively.” Harry walked away from his friend, moving to a pillow covered chest. Removing the pillows, he pulled the lid upwards.

“What do you mean by figuratively?” Draco moved to stand beside his friend, who was peering intently at the contents of the chest. Curious, Draco watched as Harry removed a silver mechanism. “What is that?”

Harry smiled as he admired the weapon. “This is a SIG P230SL.” Harry removed the empty magazine. “Its magazine has the capacity to hold eight rounds.” In a fleeting movement, he leveled the barrel at Draco, causing the other to jump.

Harry smirked, while Draco frowned. "Is it dangerous?"

"You tell me. You jumped." Grabbing the empty magazine, Harry meticulously reloaded it with bullets. "It is a muggle firearm, Draco. I haven't used it in a long time."

"Do you remember how?"

"It's like riding a bicycle... you never forget." Harry returned the magazine. "I think it would be more suiting if you continued used your wand. It would be too dangerous to give you a gun." Harry, however, did remove and load a Beretta M84. "Jonas, come here." Harry began talking before the boy had reached him. "You will be leaving through a passageway. If anyone attacks you, I want you to use this." The small jet-black Beretta seemed to fit perfectly in Jonas's hands, causing Harry to recall some of his earlier missions. Abruptly, he regretted placing that gun in the boy's hand. "Only use, if you have to."

Jonas simply nodded his head. Fear was not evident in his eyes, once again painfully reminding Harry of another boy. Shaking his head to rid his mind of his thoughts, Harry rose to his feet and quickly showed the youth how to operate the gun. When he had finished, Harry stretched. His body felt relieved, a sure sign that the potion had done its job.

"We have to get ready, Draco." Harry said. "Jonas, come." The boy followed him, until Harry stopped before a door. Opening it, he revealed a narrow staircase. "Jonas, you are to follow this tunnel. I will come for you later. Now go."

Once the boy had entered, Harry shut and locked the door. He would not give Jonas the opportunity to change his mind. 'My bird,' Harry thought absentmindedly to himself. 'The carrier of the items I lost.'

"Why couldn't we take the secret passageway?" Draco asked morosely.

"Where would the fun be in that?" Harry continued down the hallway, leaving his friend to run to catch him. "I will not pass up this chance to kill Dumbledore."

Draco frowned. "Are you sure we are not walking into something we cannot handle. This is very Gryffindor-like of you, Marvolo."

Harry stopped, though his face continued to stare forward. His bangs hid his eyes from his friend, leaving Draco to wonder if his friend was angry or about to give in to reason.

"Draco, school is out. This is what we call life." Harry muttered. "I am not rushing into this fight. We have the advantage, and we will exploit that advantage. This is my turf... I know it well."

Draco looked out a grimy window at the polluted industrial region. At least, there would be no lack of cover. Nodding his head, Draco silently agreed. "I'm with you, Marvolo."

At that moment, the wards guarding the house went off. With a wave of his wand, Harry silenced them. Looking grimly over at Draco, he nodded his head briefly. "We have company."

"Better not disappoint them."

Harry's eyes deaden. "Draco, we have to hit fast before reinforcements arrive. You go right, while I go left. Whatever happens, Draco, you are not to engage Dumbledore. He is mine."

One curt nod was the only answer Harry needed, and the pair split, going in opposite directions. Replacing his wand into his robes, Harry withdrew the SIG. Pausing before he turned the corridor, he cocked the barrel. His index finger rested lightly on the trigger. Turning the corner, Harry pulled the trigger hard, nailing an Auror in the head. The man's blood decorated the back wall.

Once more Harry readied the gun as he barreled down the hallway. This was his house; he was not bound to allow it to be sullied by Dumbledore or his men. Coming to a 'T' in the hallway, Harry extended his right hand, which held the SIG, down the one side while he used wandless magic to cover the left side. A scream exited the throat of a female Auror just as the bullet from the SIG connected with her chest, knocking her backwards. To Harry's left, the second dark wizard catcher never got to utter another sound as a red beam severed his head from his body.

Turning sharply to the left, Harry began his descent down the stair to the ground floor. In rapid succession, Harry fired of three rounds each hitting a different target. Ducking for cover behind a dilapidated sofa, Harry returned his SIG to its holder and removed his wand. He would save the last three rounds.

*"Avada Kedavra!"* Harry screamed at an Auror that stood before the exit. The man's body was hurled backwards, his eyes wide though lacking life. Crouching close to the ground and wall, Harry hurled the door open. As he expected, spells instantly followed, however they connected only with air. His opponents paused dumbfounded, and in that moment Harry acted. Decisively, he terminated the three guards. His head bowed he walked toward Draco's exit, leaving the corpse behind.

In the distance, he heard a cry that he knew did not belong to Draco. At a sprint, Harry continued. Around the corner of the building he paused to see Draco toying with one of his victims. The Auror withered underneath the Cruciatus Curse. Without his friend's notice, Harry came to stand beside him. Harry's face tightened as he watched the man's body twist in agony. He remained wordless, only raising his wand.

*"Avada Kedavra!"* Harry's hushed voice said. Draco jumped at the voice. Harry, however, made no move to recognize the blonde.

"Why did you do that?" Draco shouted. "You almost gave me a heart attack."

"Don't behave like a common Death Eater." Harry retorted angrily.

"What is wrong with you, Marvolo?"

Harry's jaw clenched. "Give them quick deaths." Silence fell between them. "We don't have time for this, Draco." Harry waved at the crumple form.

Draco's face still portrayed the rage he felt. However, he made no further comment. A spell came at the pair, forcing them to concentrate on the matter at hand. Both immediately sought cover.

“Draco,” Harry called. “Same as last time. They are spread throughout the warehouses.”

Draco nodded his head sharply, and then left his cover, which was rusted old car. Harry immediately followed suit, however he went left, while Draco took the right. Using his wand to block the spells that attacked him, Harry made it safely to the first warehouse. In his blood, he could almost feel Dumbledore near by. Harry could still remember how it felt to have the man’s eyes resting on him. It was unnerving. As his feet hit the pavement, words flitted through his head.

*Canta per me ne addio*

*quell dolce suono*

*de’ passati giorni*

*mi sempre rammenta*

A beam of blue light shot from his wand, puncturing an Auror’s chest. The man fell silently to the ground as his life force drained from his body. Harry’s eyes darted around the street looking for his next opponent.

*La vita dell’amore*

*Dilette del cor mio*

*O felice, tu anima mia*

*Canta addagio...*

He did not have to look far. And with a quick slash of his wand he sent the fool flying through the air into a building. A thunking noise echoed, reaching Harry’s ears. However, it did not occupy Harry’s mind long since his next victim was now racing toward him. A dull red light emitted from Harry’s wand. When it hit the Auror’s chest it left a gapping wound, one that no amount of magic could repair. The man’s glassy eyes peered back at the youth. His mouth moved but no words formed, instead he collapsed to the ground.



*Tempra la cetra e cantra*

*Il inno di morte*

*A noi si schiude il ciel*

*Volano al raggio*

Harry ran passed the dead man, turning to his right. He paused briefly to along his lungs draw in the necessary breaths. Harry was about to move once more when he suddenly halted. Spinning around, he was greeted by the image of the aged Albus Dumbledore. The man's icy blue eyes lacked their usually twinkle, making them oddly match Harry's own dead eyes.

A cold smile tugged at Harry's lips. "I have waited for this moment."

"What do you hope to gain from this, Harry?" The headmaster asked.

Clutching his wand tightly, Harry caused his fingers to change to a pallor color. "Nothing... and everything."

Raising his wand, Harry laughed quietly before he began this dance of death.

*La vita dell'amore*

*Dilette del cor mio*

*O felice, tu anima mia*

*Canta addio...*

## Chapter Twenty-One: Can't Go Back

*Previously:*

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*La vita dell'amore*

*Dilette del cor mio*

*O felice, tu anima mia*

*Canta addio...*

""""

The pavement echoed with the sound of moving feet, creating a rhythm that the city lights seemed to dance in step with. In the background, rubble fell when a slashing spell sent from Harry's wand hit Dumbledore's barrier. Undeterred, Harry continued his assault on the headmaster. A hellish light glinted in Harry's eyes, causing a level of trepidation to rise in Dumbledore.

"Harry, I can understand your anger at me." Dumbledore shouted after blocking another one of Harry's attacks.

"You know nothing of my rage!" The youth dodged a stunner.

Dumbledore frowned forbiddingly. "Why can't you allow yourself to be saved? Why do you allow yourself to suffer so? I gave you a choice to end this!"

A slight breeze tugged at the youth's black hair. "What choice? There was never a choice, Dumbledore!" Harry retorted, his face becoming

unrecognizable when compared with that youth that had been at Hogwarts.

"You owe Voldemort nothing." Dumbledore tried to reason. "You would have had a happy life, if he had not robbed you from the cradle!"

Harry laughed, his wand never leaving his target. "Would I have? Oh, how little you know... if I hadn't been taken, my biological parents would have been killed. Then after they were out of the way, you would have stepped in. I may have been your pawn in that life... but I will not be in this lifetime."

"Harry, please... you are not a murderer."

"Today, I will become one." Harry paused, smirking. "Now, dear Headmaster, this is a fight to the death not a conversation of my father's parenting skills. I suggest you prepare yourself." Even as Harry finished his sentence, he released another slashing spell at Dumbledore.

Dumbledore blocked the spell. "I will not fight you."

Harry's eyes flickered dangerously. "You will fight."

"I will not give you the pleasure of a fight." Dumbledore stated firmly. "You are not a cold blood killer. You will not be able to strike me down, unless I fight back-."

A bright red light grazed the Headmaster's right shoulder. Harry sneered at the look of surprise that graced Dumbledore's face. The Headmaster's eyes sparked briefly before they cooled, while his lips parted. His hand touched the injured location, and in seconds the cut healed.

"I am a monster, Dumbledore... a monster that needs slain. You can truly see me now, yet you still try to save me. You did not do so with my father."

Dumbledore shook his head. "I can truly see you... and that is why I cannot kill you. You are different from your father, yet you are the

same. It is almost as if you have become the same person.” Then Dumbledore did the unforgivable. He turned his back on Harry and began to walk away.

“Don’t turn your back to me, Dumbledore!” Harry screamed as he leveled his wand at his moving target.

Dumbledore paused, looking briefly over his shoulder. “You can feel the decay... that is why you search for this end, Harry. The walls have all but closed around you, and you can only see but one way out... your death.” He paused. “That is why you fight me now, Harry. You do not seek my death but your own. And that is something I will not give you, because I cannot kill something that does not even know itself.”

“Do not presume to know what is in my mind!” Harry retorted, his knuckles now white. “I want you to die.”

“To die for showing you the truth? To die for awaking you from fantasy?”

“No.” Harry murmured. “For killing me in a most painful manner. For the poison you gave me is the slowest most painful poison you could have possibly put in my blood stream.”

“The truth is never easy to swallow.”

“It was not the truth... it was morality.” Harry whispered. “It plagues my every move and eats at my soul. Hmph... you will not believe this, Dumbledore, but I was once happy... I once knew life. Then you showed me the shadows. Ironic really, you sought to show me light... but I had already basked in its warmth. You left me with nothing but the cold... and for that I will kill you.” His emerald eyes lessened. “Even if you do not fight back.”

Dumbledore partially turned toward Harry. “You won’t.”

Harry smirked. “I have something you want... the only way to destroy Voldemort. And the only way to get it is to kill me.” He waited for the Headmaster’s facial expression, and was pleased to see his face

suddenly harden. 'Thank-you, Neville for not telling him about the Horcrux.'

"If that is how it must be, Harry."

The youth snorted. 'All you care about, old man, are your plans.' Harry thought. "It is the only way."

Dumbledore nodded his head. "I am sorry, Harry."

"You say that as if you think I am going to die." Harry said before he sent a banishing charm in Dumbledore's direction. Even with his barrier, the aged wizard was pushed backwards, though he managed to remain standing.

Fighting the surprise at the ferocity of the attack, Dumbledore was dodged the next attack just as his shield was broken. His feet moved quickly as he set his body into an offensive position. A jet of blue light left his wand only to be turned aside by a barrier created by Harry. Silently, Dumbledore awed at the boy's talent. While he was at Hogwarts, he had not showed such a gift, even in Harry's memories the youth had not shown such tenacity. 'He's driven by sheer hatred.' Dumbledore thought briefly as he was pushed backwards by the fierce attacks that came within seconds of each other.

Seeing his moment, Harry lashed heatedly at the faltering Headmaster. The barrier in which his opponent had just newly formed wavered and then disappeared in its entirety. Harry's wand leveled with Dumbledore's face. "I am surprised. I was expecting a better duel from you. You not even reach the level of some of my other targets!"

A twinkle appeared in Dumbledore's eyes. 'That is because I am not finished.'

Harry felt his feet lift into the air as a burst of energy hit his body. His wand fell, hitting the ground with a dull sound. Using wandless magic, Harry was able to slow his landing into the building behind. His body finally halted when his back brushed against the concrete wall. Narrowing his eyes, Harry searched briefly for his wand. To his disdain, it was far from his grasp. His attention shot to Dumbledore

just as the old began his new assault. The concrete, in which Harry had been standing in front of, suddenly bore a dent from where Dumbledore's spell hit its surface.

The sound of his breathing filled Harry's ears. He knew that before long he would not be able to evade the Headmaster's spells much longer. The old man showed no signs of stopping. A crimson light hit far too close. Pausing, Harry sent a green light. The light started strongly, however, before it reached its target it fizzled to nothingness.

Harry moaned with pain when a spark of red collided with his left hip. Calling upon his anger, he created a slashing spell. This time his wandless magic met its intended target, ripping Dumbledore's right sleeve and flesh. Blood shot from the wound as the spell shot passed. In reaction to the sharp pain, the Headmaster's hand released his wand.

With his left hand, Dumbledore grasped his wounded arm. "You are stronger than I had first thought, Harry."

Harry smirked across from his opponent, not even bothering to staunch his own wound. The pain that he had felt became numb as he grew accustomed to its throbs. "Enough chat-." Harry did not finish his sentence.

The magically burst that Dumbledore had shot at him seemed to trace his movements. His evasive maneuvers were not enough, and the bolt hit behind him with enough power that the pavement splitter shooting up into the air with Harry. The hard pieces of debris battered Harry's body. When the maelstrom of rubble had finally settled, Dumbledore was pleased to see Harry's form collapsed on the pavement.

The sound of the Headmaster's footsteps slowly approaching his downed body caused Harry to grab at what energy he could muster. He could sense the old man staring down. His gaze caused the hair of the back of Harry's head to rise. One wizened hand touched his shoulder and slowly turned his limp body over. When Harry felt this, he reacted with lightning reactions. The old wizard screamed, and quickly he retracted his hand as a bolt that felt like electricity coursed through his body.

His distressed mind only vaguely sensed his body being lifted into the air. It was not until that last second that he was able to rescue himself. Exhausted, Harry rose shakily to his feet. His face lined in agony and fatigue. The silver SIG appeared in his hands and shortly afterwards one round fired. Dumbledore stumbled backwards, staring into the youth eyes. His lip trembled slightly when he saw for the first time emotion in the boy's eyes. In the orbs of emerald, he saw fear mingled with anger surrounded desperation.

Harry's hand shook violently as the wave of emotions he could not understand assaulted his mind. Tears flowed down his eyes, even as his finger pressed against the trigger. The sound of two more rounds light the night, followed by a hallow clicking sound as Harry absently hit the trigger numerous times. Understanding flared into Harry's mind and the barrel of the SIG fell to the ground. His left hand quickly wiped the offending tears from his face. When he looked up with his glazed eyes, Harry mindlessly stared at the crumple form of Albus Dumbledore that lay at his feet. The Headmaster would never rise from this spot. He had been killed by a weapon created by the very people he sought to aid.

The SIG dropped to the ground. Harry turned to find his wand and grasped its smooth surface. Secretly, he did not like the detached feeling that trickled through his body. Twice now, Dumbledore had caused him to loose something. The first time had been in that office when Harry had been forced to walk down that corridor once more time. But tonight, Harry had lost something so much more. Even though he did not know what it was, the feeling inside his body told him it was far more important, and loosing it, without first understanding it was a cataclysm.

""""

James sped down the alleyways. The explosions of the handgun goaded him further. He had long since abandoned Sirius. Despite his friends urging that he should be present with him when he confronted Harry, James however knew that only he could talk to his son. 'My son? James, why do you call him that... he can never be yours.' James chided himself. As he turned the corner, his heartbeat raged wildly in his chest before it stopped. His hazel eyes first landed on the

corpse Albus Dumbledore. They shifted next to the back of Harry. The youth's head was bowed as he began to walk away. His torn and ragged robes billowed behind him.

"Harry!" James screamed at the retreating figure. "You have to stop this!"

The retreating form halted, however it did not show any signs of having heard him otherwise.

"You need to stop." James repeated. "Don't you feel any remorse? I can understand your anger at Dumbledore, but revenge does not solve anything. Can you honestly say that you feel better?"

Harry turned his face so he could look directly into James's eyes. The elder was surprised to find the adolescent's eyes stained with tears.

"Harry, come with me."

A bittersweet smile passed on to the boy's mouth. "And then we could be one happy family." Laughter erupted in Harry's throat even though tears continued to trail down his cheeks. "I can't do that, Potter." His hand touched his wet face. "I cry yet I feel nothing... neither sorrow nor anger. I don't understand... why do I cry? I do not cry for Dumbledore. He deserved this fate. Perhaps, I cry for myself? For that feeling of warmth I once held..."

James watched helplessly as the youth turned away. "Please, Harry!"

Harry closed his eyes, avoiding looking at the man that stood behind him. "Nothing can we call our own but death and that small model of the barren earth which serves as paste and cover to our bones." He whispered, marking the words spoken by Shakespeare's Richard II. His hands tightened slightly as he recalled Moody's parting words. "Moody was right. The only thing that follows me is death. Others deaths... and finally my death. Stay away from me, Potter, or you too shall meet your death, because everything I touched decays until it is nothing more than dust."

"That is not true."



“Look at your family. Since my presence has become known, I have made your lives hell.” Harry greatened the distance between him and Potter. “There is only one thing you can do, Potter, remember me as that toddler you once held and forget about the monster I have become, because that child and I are really not the same individual.”

James looked away from the straight back of his eldest son. His hazel eyes began to water. “So this is where it ends.”

“It never was.” Harry answered walking out of sight.

“”””

The ripped robe served as a perfect tourniquet for the injury sustained to his hip. The bleeding had already ceased. By the time Harry would reach his destination, he would most likely possess the strength to heal the wound with his wand. His feet faltered, forcing him to lean on a near by wall. His shagging shoulders raised as he inhaled sharply, trying to get enough air into his lungs. The ribs that he had mended had become loose during the final part of his duel with Dumbledore, making it difficult to breath. The Aurors, thanks largely to James Potter’s help, had already discovered the bullet riddled corpse of the esteemed Headmaster. Reluctantly, Harry had to admit that it was thanks to Potter that the large Auror task force had not found him.

Harry silently wondered if Draco would be at the Apparation Point. A certainty filled Harry’s frame. ‘He will be there.’ Pushing off from the wall, Harry’s leg treaded onward. He still had to pick up the boy. His mind wandered briefly on to the topic of why he had taken to the boy. ‘He holds what I have lost.’ His mind flashed back to the mythology of birds, in which it was said they carried a person’s soul in birth and death. Vaguely, Harry nodded his head in sureness. ‘He holds what I lost.’

The passageway’s exit lay just ahead. Quietly, Harry approached the small boy. The Beretta leveled at Harry. The boy’s eyes closed without actually seeing who stood before him. In panic, Jonas pulled the trigger. With his wand in hand, Harry constructed a barrier. The bullet’s course was averted to the brick exterior of a building. The

Beretta dropped to the ground the second Jonas actually took the time to see who he had fired at. His eyes widen with remorse when he saw Harry on his knees before him.

"I didn't-!" He began before he was cut off.

"I shouldn't have snuck up on you." Harry said between his gasps. "Hand me the gun. We have to leave."

The boy cautiously picked up the metal weapon. He was no eyeing it with fear. Harry immediately pulled it from the boys grip and replaced it in his robes after setting the safety. "Let's go." Harry ordered, rising painfully to his feet.

Jonas fell into step beside him. His eyes still portrayed the regret he felt, concerning the gun.

"I'm sorry." His little voice said.

Harry looked briefly at the blonde youth before returning his eyes straight ahead. "Words are meaningless, Jonas. Actions speak louder."

The boy frowned as he considered them. For the remainder of the journey he remained absolutely silent, which suited Harry.

At the Apparation site, Harry's heart lightened to see Draco standing ready to leave. "You got to be kidding me, Marvolo! You're not taking the kid with us!"

"Only for now." Harry answered.

"What will your father do?"

Harry paused slightly. "He will accept it."

Draco looked doubtfully.

"It is no different then when he took me, Draco." Harry whispered.

His friend moved closer. "What is it about this child that amuses you? There is nothing special about him."

Harry removed his wand and grabbed the blonde's hand, preparing for Apparation. "He has something that I lack." Harry whispered before apparating to his father's fortress.

Without waiting for his friend to materialize, Harry walked toward his home. He dropped the boy's hand and did not wait for him to follow. He knew Jonas would follow out of nature and once again he was reminded of his own past. The Death Eaters that opened them stared in bewilderment at the child that followed their lord's son. The Dark Lord, himself, just looked on.

He only murmured one line. "And so history repeats itself, once more."

## Chapter Twenty-Two: The Catacombs

The cool breeze ruffled Harry's hair as he stared upon the bare and desolate trees that had long since been devoid of leaves. The first snow would eventually cover their bareness in time, turning the landscape into a winter wonderland. Tears stung Harry's eyes, formed by the cold that assaulted him. He blinked against the chill, before drying the tears with his sleeve. Blinking once more, Harry turned his attention to his solitary companion, who was curled into the depth of a red sleeping bag. The only part of the boy that showed was his now red nose. Harry smiled slightly. 'My constant shadow.' He did not blame the child for remaining close while in the Dark Lord's fortress. Jonas like every Wizarding child acquainted Voldemort as the bad guy. Harry frowned slightly. His father had not yet confronted him about the boy's presence, nor had he met with him. This relieved Harry, though he knew such a meeting was inevitable. Despite one less concern, he discovered that the sense of dread that engulfed his heart still remained. It did not help that he felt that he was standing before a chasm blindfolded. He quickly brushed these thoughts away, since they were altogether unwanted and pointless.

In the distance, hints of the sun became evident as it poked its way upward. It had been awhile since Harry had sat like this, simply watching the sunrise. It was one of the regular happenings of life that he missed. Absently, he bit at his bottom lip, before leaning back into the hard wooden bench. Even the light of the sun could not cure him of this damn feeling. Harry exhaled in exasperation and stretched his legs out before him, trying to strike up his blood flow.

"Marvolo." A familiar female voice echoed on the balcony. "Don't you think it is a little cold out here?"

A smile became visible on Harry's lips. "I find that the cold clears my head."

Harry heard the rustle of garments, before he saw the black robes out of the corner of his eyes.

"Really?" Bellatrix whispered, mimicking his posture. "I find that sleep clears the mind better. There are no thoughts to vex the mind."

“Only dreams.” Harry murmured now looking fully at her.

“You have not been sleeping these past days.”

His eyes shifted away. “Every time I try to sleep, I see images. But when I awake I can’t remember them. I feel like I have lost something... something very important.” He paused. “It eats at me that I can not remember.”

“Dreams are just as they are... dreams. Don’t trouble yourself over them.”

Harry eyed Bellatrix. It was like her to brush such things away. “I suppose it could be concerning some of my earlier missions.”

Bellatrix’s gaze darkened. “I would think you were passed that stage. You have to grow up, Harry. Leave the past where it belongs. Feel no remorse. There is nothing to fear from ghosts. Only the living can harm you.”

“We have come a long way, Bella.” Harry whispered, causing Bellatrix’s eyes to widen slightly. “I remember, when I was little, you hated me. For all purposes, I understand now, but when I was little I couldn’t.” A smirk appeared on Harry’s face. “I remember that first mission that you and I were put together for. I was six at the time. It went sour.”

“It ended well.”

“But at the time, it looked bad.” His voice trailed off. “I think that mission is how this began. You became my protector.”

Lestrangle shifted in her seat. “Why bring this up, Marvolo? I do not like this gleam that I see in your eyes.” Her warm hand touched his cold one. “Why do I feel that-.”

Harry pulled his hand away. “Don’t say it, Bellatrix, and then perhaps we can continue to be blind. Besides it will only make our lives miserable to guess the future.”

“I hate goodbyes.” She stated, staring sullenly at the forest below.

"Always one to disregard." He rose from the bench, looking down at the woman that had been like a mother, albeit a twisted one but a mother all the same. "I know you are not one for sentiments, but I-."

"I know." Bellatrix stated simply, refusing to meet his eyes.

Harry smirked. "Words are meaningless." Harry blinked and when he opened his eyes, his jaw went lax. The sun seemed to cast a ghostly glow on the woman who sat alone on the bench. 'Why do you seek meaning in everything?' He questioned in his mind before bending down and lifting the sleeping form of Jonas. "Let's go in."

Bellatrix shook her head and continued to lounge on the bench. "I will catch up in a bit." Her gaze returned the sunrise, though her eyes seemed focused on something far more secluded.

""

The afternoon had progressed. The first snowflakes began their descent from the gray clouds that seemed endless. These first flakes, however, did not remain. Instead, as soon as they land on the still warm earth, they melted into nonexistence, leaving no evidence of their being. The only memory that would last regarding their descent would be the entertainment they provided for one boy.

Harry watched on slightly amused as Jonas chased after the November flakes. His tongue extended trying to catch them in his mouth. A smile crept onto Harry's face. How different Jonas's childhood would be from his own. Already at this boy's age, Harry had begun his services for his father. He had been using muggle weapons and some magical spells. Instead of tasting fresh snow, Harry had tasted blood. He had only watched from his secluded studies as the snow fell, wondering silently what the white substance would feel like if it would touch his face. A frown replaced the smile.

Snow did not hold happy memories. His mind flashed back to him, walking idly down a country road. The cold snow had stung his face, while the winter air caused his blood-soaked hands to harden. His thoughts were brought back to the moment when he felt a presence beside him. Harry turned his head and looked at his father.

Voldemort's eyes followed the gleeful child. "When you returned from internment, I did not like the change that I saw in you. I believe you understand me well, Harry. You have always been used as my tool. Even knowing this, you do not hate me."

"I could never hate you." Harry stated. "I should... but I don't. You have done too much for me. Ours is a partnership."

Voldemort nodded, turning to return to the warmth of the fortress. "Keep the child. He might prove useful." He whispered, pausing on his way to the door. "There is a task I need you to fulfill for me."

Harry's eyes peered over his shoulder, resting intently on his father's back.

"I have one Horcrux remaining. It is notebook containing the collective research of Rowena Ravenclaw. I believe you will remember the appearance of the notebook."

"Of course," Harry murmured in memory. "I was the one who 'purchased' it for you."

"Now I need you to guard it, and then bring it to me." His father paused. "I will disclose its location to you shortly. Bellatrix and Draco will be accompanying you. The catacombs are too dangerous for a large group to enter. The passage ways are too narrow."

After disclosing this mission, the Dark Lord left, and Harry returned his attention to the joyful chortles of the boy before him. As he watched, he could not help but wish that time would freeze forever at this moment. But there would be no such gift.

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Dorian leaned back in his chair, staring warily at his companions, Neville Longbottom and Hermione Granger. The pair had invited him to the Hog's Head, though they had been secretive on their purposes for the rendezvous. However, now that he was here, Dorian had begun to dislike where this conversation was leading even so he choose to remain. His hand grasped tightly onto the handle of his

mug. The butterbeer contained within rippled at the slight shaking of his hand.

“What do you think, Dorian?” Hermione asked tentatively.

He released his mug’s handle. “It is dangerous and foolish. I don’t think Professor Dumbledore would have approved of this.”

Neville looked straight into Dorian’s eyes. “The year before and this past summer, Dumbledore was training me and preparing me to find the Horcruxes. Only one remains now. I propose to find it and destroy it.”

Dorian’s lips thinned. “The one around Harry’s neck.”

“No,” Neville said, his gaze never straying from Dorian. “He gave that to me willingly before he left Hogwarts. All that remains is Rowena Ravenclaw’s notebook. According to Pierce, it is hidden in a catacomb that is located in the countryside just outside of Oxford.”

“We could use your help, Dorian.” Hermione pleaded silently.

“Voldemort has probably already sent someone to either remove the Horcrux or guard it.” Dorian paused, shifting his eyes between his two friends. “This will lead you to your deaths.”

“Maybe, but at least we will be doing something to stop Voldemort.” Neville spoke with conviction, his hands clenching into fists as he spoke the Dark Lord’s name. “He will most likely have sent Harry to do this task. He has a soft spot for you.”

“I won’t do it.” Dorian pushed back his chair, rising from the table. “He has done so much for me. I will not in return do this to him. He saved my life... I know he got Fudge to sign that reprieve for me. I will not... I cannot ask more from him.”

“I understand, Dorian.” Neville stated also rising from the table. “It will be just Hermione, Tonks, and I, then.”

“Tonks? She’s going with you?”



Hermione nodded. "She refused to let us go alone. Sirius was going to come also, but decided against it for the same reasons you have."

Neville extended his hand to Dorian. "Thank-you for hearing us out."

His own hand clasped Neville's. "Good luck. I do hope to see you again." He said before hugging Hermione, who had tears stinging her eyes as she returned the embrace.

"We will see you hopefully soon, Dorian." She whispered. "Keep out of trouble."

"You know me, Hermione, I am trouble." A lopsided grin briefly touched Dorian's face before it vanished. 'How do they expect to succeed where Dumbledore failed?' He looked at the pair once more before leaving the pub. Inhaling the brisk November air, he had one last thought. 'It is good to be alive.'

Inside, Neville turned to Hermione. "We knew he wouldn't come." He stated.

The curls in Hermione's hair bounced when she nodded her head. "It was worth the try. He is perhaps the only thing that proves that Harry has a shred of humanity left." Her eyes darkened. "I will never forgive that monster for killing Ron."

"We can't be certain."

"I am."

Neville knew there would be no arguing with her. She was firm in her belief that Harry had been Ron Weasley's murderer. "Let's go 'Mione. There is nothing left for us to do here, besides Tonks is waiting."

""""

The atmosphere inside the catacombs was fitting, Harry thought idly. To either side of him holes were craved into the walls. The final resting spot for various souls, now housed a variety of protective curses and one Horcrux. Somewhere, Harry could hear running water dripping from some crack in the hard concrete. Turning to look behind

him, he was greeted by Bellatrix Lestrange's dour expression. The torch Harry carried wavered slightly from his movements, leading him to feel a tug on his robes. Looking down, he saw the pale face of Jonas. Harry uttered no words of comfort. The boy would have to learn that there were far worse things than the dark.

"How far until we reach the entryway?" Draco's voice called.

"It's not far." Harry answered, running through his father's words. "I see the dead-end now."

"Don't say 'dead' end." Draco's drawled, causing a smile to appear on Harry's face.

"What other term would you prefer me to use, Draco?" Harry retorted. "Besides, it is altogether fitting after all we are in catacombs."

"Cul-de-sac would work far better."

"Enough bickering." Bellatrix said sharply. "We do not want a muggle caretaker to hear voices in a tomb."

Harry nodded. "Bella, take this." He said as he handed her the torch that had become a necessity since they would all require their wand. His hand entered his robes and removed his wand. Using a series of complicated movements, Harry was able to open the door. His stomach plummeted as he looked at the narrow staircase that led down into the depths of the earth. On either side was a chasm that appeared to have no end. The stone staircase itself appeared to have seen better days.

"Shit." Draco muttered as he looked over Harry's shoulder. "How are we supposed to get down that?"

"Watch your steps." Harry said, clapping Draco's shoulder. Then he bent down, swinging Jonas onto his back.

"It's not fair that he gets a piggyback ride." Draco muttered, glaring icily at the boy. "Why is he even here? This is no place for a kid."

“There was no other place for him.” Harry rejoined before beginning his descent.

Bellatrix brushed passed Draco, closely following Harry. “Keep up, nephew.”

“Yes, Auntie.”

Outside the crypt, three pairs of eyes watched silently. They had been there from the beginning.

“Do you think it is safe?” Hermione Granger asked, keeping her voice to a mere whisper.

Neville and Tonks exchanged looks before the Auror nodded her head. “When we are in there stay quiet. Use the Disillusionment Charm that I taught you, and then we should be fine.”

Both of the adolescents nodded their heads. Moving their wands in synch, the three blended into their surrounds, even so, they were still able to see each other do to a special modification to the charm.

“Let’s go.” Tonks hissed as she led the way in.

Inside the catacomb, the three made out the faint glow of a torch in the distance. Tonks motioned them to follow her with a brief wave of her hand. Neville saw the gleam in Tonks’s eyes. ‘We’re lucky that we arrive at the same time. All we have to do is allow them to ride the protections for us.’

Tonks’s face creased in concentration. Neville could understand why. The young Auror was not known for her stealth skills. ‘Perhaps, this time she won’t trip on her own feet.’ Neville thought hopefully. His attention moved to Hermione whose hand was running against the cold stone walls as if she needed support. In front, Neville heard Draco’s voice, commenting about a dead-end, followed a swift quip on Harry’s part. Neville’s face set grimly. Getting passed Harry would be a difficult task, indeed.

Their Auror companion stopped them just before the landing of the stairs. "We wait here until they have completed their descent." Tonks whispered.

Below them, Harry fumbled on one of the stairs, quickly regaining his balance. His cargo's grip around his neck tightened to the point that it was also cutting off Harry's airflow.

"Harry, are you alright?" Bellatrix asked concerned.

"Yes, be careful with that next step."

"Thanks for the warning." Draco called appreciatorily, his face pale from the strain of navigating down the stairs.

"Anytime."

The light from the torch that Bellatrix held illuminated the path before Harry, though not to the extent that he would be able to see five steps in front of him. Briefly, he wondered how much longer it would take until they reached the base. His father had only said that the descent would be long. He had never said how long. Harry's leg muscles tightened from the stress he felt as he carefully planned every move. Sweat teemed down his brow and into his eyes, despite the cold air. Secretly, he began to regret not grabbing an extra robe.

"There." Bellatrix stated aloud. "The three doorwayss the Lord spoke of."

Harry nodded eyeing the three gaping holes that held the appearance of three extremely lofty doorways. "We split up here. I will go down the right, which houses the Horcrux, Draco you will go down the left and guard our exit, while, Bella, you will have the center, which is a dead-end. I believe you have been briefed concerning the various spells that your passageways hold?" His only answer was two nods. "If our intelligence is any good, the 'vandals' should be arriving anytime. After they are dealt with, we will return to the fortress with the Horcrux." Harry pointed his wand at the torch, and began to replicate two other ones. "Here, Draco." He said passing one to the blonde. The other he kept for himself, while Bellatrix continued to carry the original.

"Let's get on with it already." Draco said, proceeding to walk toward his specified passageway. "See you on the other side."

Harry nodded. His gaze shifted to Bellatrix who stood beside him. "You will be careful?"

She smiled. "There is no fun in that." Walking toward the center passageway, she paused. "Marvolo, no shame and no regrets... remember that."

Lestrangle disappeared down the tunnel, leaving Harry feeling suddenly alone. Wordlessly, he slung Jonas down to the ground. "You can walk now... just stay behind me."

"Ok," was the only response Harry received from the boy.

The walls narrowed until they reached the point that Harry was forced to turn sideways to continue. Out of the corner of his eye, he instantly noticed that the walls curved in further. Pausing, he eyed his companion. 'His frame is small enough that he can get through.' Harry frowned. 'But once through-.' He broke that thought off. "Jonas, we need to go back for a moment." As always, the boy obeyed without little thought. Once in an area where Harry could freely move, he turned to the boy. "I need you to do me a favor."

"I would do anything." Jonas's silvery eyes beamed with such a radiant light.

"I can't fit through-." Harry hated himself. "I need you to be my eyes... my body."

The boy looked at him confused. "Will it hurt?"

"N-no, it won't. I won't let anything happen to you." Harry whispered before with his free hand he removed his wand. "*There is something I need you to do for me. It is something that only you can do.*" Harry bit his lip fighting back the undesirable memories. "It will only be for a while." His wand moved in a familiar motion, and the result was immediate. Instead of the usual alert eyes, Harry's eyes met dull glazed ones. "Take this." He handed the child his own wand, and switched to wandless magic to control Jonas.

‘Go down the tunnel, Jonas.’ His thoughts beckoned to the youth, and the child obeyed. In his mind, Harry saw what Jonas saw. He became alert immediately when he saw a green light hovering at the end of the tunnel. ‘Duck!’ The boy’s body collapsed to the ground, even as Harry flung himself up against the wall allowing the light to pass by. ‘Get up fast and enter the room.’ Harry’s mind hissed. ‘Run to the far left corner, dodge any spell that comes in your direction, once you’re in the room, then halt.’ Harry’s ears picked up the harsh sounds of wards being launched, some coming close enough to the boy to cause Harry to cringe.

Raising his hand, Harry projected an image of what he wished Jonas to do with the wand. Shortly afterwards, a short hissing sound greeted Harry. Letting out a sigh of relief, Harry watched as the walls retracted. Inside, Jonas stared dully at the opposite wall, completely unaware of Harry’s approach. Reaching for his wand, Harry noticed that the youth was bleeding from where a spell had grazed his temple.

“It looks like I didn’t keep my word, hmm?” Using his wand, Harry cleaned and healed the gash before awaking the boy. Once awake, Jonas immediately began to survey the room. Harry noticed the boy seemed to freeze when he saw the spell damaged walls. ‘He knows, they were meant for him.’

“Why are there so many traps in here?” The boy asked quietly.

“To keep intruders out.” Harry answered. “No one but the master, or those who bare his permission, can enter here.” His eyes floated across archaic walls, which were decorated in swords of times long past. Two rows of pillars ran across the breadth of the room. At the end of the room was another door created out of metal. Beyond that door rested the Horcrux. “Jonas, you are to remain here.”

The boy nodded.

Opening the door, Harry pushed on toward the next room, his wand clenched tightly in his hand. A silver door stood before him, twin snakes engraved in its metallic surface. Raising his wand, he pointed it at the door. **“You will part for me. For I am the Dark Lord Voldemort’s heir.”** He hissed in Parseltongue.

The two snakes' eyes glimmered with a brilliant green light, which seemed to connect with his wand. His hand shook as his wand vibrated. One of the heads pulled free from the door, eying Harry with disdain.

**"You smell of much blood, child."** It hissed, its forked-tongue flickering as it did so.

Its partner's head snapped free. **"You give us a title, and expect us to part. Tell me why should we give you entrance."**

Harry eyes narrowed dangerously. **"Because my father commands it... that is why you will let me pass."**

The two heads looked at each. A wicked smile spreading across the first one's mouth. **"And so we will let you passed, human who reeks of blood, only because the master wishes it. Because otherwise we would have devoured one who carries the tainted blood of a muggle-born. Though, methinks, you have covered such an ignominy with the blood of others quite well."**

The second head nodded. **"Pass through,"** it hissed. **"For I find you worthy of being."**

A loud noise filled Harry's ears as the snakes returned to their places and the silver door sprung open, revealing an eerily blue lit room. Clouds of mist rose from the floor, forcing Harry to quickly cover his mouth and nose from the offensive odor. His eyes quickly found the object of his mission. Resting in the center, surrounded by what appeared to be acidic vapor was the notebook of Rowena Ravenclaw. Harry had no doubt that it was protected by some sort of barrier otherwise it would not be able to survive in this atmosphere. Harry paused, turning his left ear toward the doorway. 'Voices.' Harry thought. 'They are here... the fools.'

Slowly, he reentered to the hallway.

""""

Neville warily eyed the three separate tunnels. He knew that would need to separate to find the Horcrux. However, he was reluctant to do so. Tonks eyed him briefly before starting down the center.

“Neville, you and Hermione should remain together.”

“What about you?” Hermione asked stubbornly. “You can’t go by yourself.”

Tonks winked at her. “I’m a trained specialist. This is my job... dealing with Death Eaters. You two keep your noses clean. Constant Vigilance!” She said quoting her boss’s favorite saying. “We’ll meet up here, later.” She turned back to look at the crippled staircase.

“Hermione and I will check out the right.” Neville stated, eyeing the two sets of foot print that were imprinted in the layer of dust that clung to the stone floor. “Those appear appears to belong to a child... curious.”

Hermione’s mouth tightened. “Voldemort has probably become engrossed by the thought of exploiting children into become his assassins.”

“Be careful.” Tonks whispered. “If your theory proves to be true, Hermione, don’t hesitate. There is nothing to be done. Dumbledore proved that with Harry. Good luck.” Tonks, then, vanished into the darkness.

“Come, Hermione.” Neville said as he led her to right corridor.

Neville and Hermione carefully trudged against the cold wall, being careful to not create a sound. His face contorted with emotions as he tried to prepare himself for the events that would transpire. Across from him, Hermione was exceedingly pale, however there was no emotion written on her face. Neville frowned sadly. He did not like the changes that he had seen in Hermione since Ron had been murdered. His friend had become just as cold and lifeless as her boyfriend. Neville wished to see that radiance that had once sprung from her being.

“Neville,” her voice hissed. “Just up ahead there is light.”



He nodded in reply. Inches from the doorway, Neville froze. In the center of the room, a little blonde hair boy sat crouch, drawing in the dust. A expression of horror seemed glued to Hermione's face, however she continued forward, tears streaking down her face.

"Have they done to you as they did to him?"

The youth jumped to his feet, gasping in shock.

Hermione stretched her hand out to him. "We can save you... your life can be different."

Hermione jumped backwards into Neville when she noticed Harry was standing in a second doorway peering at her.

Harry moved nearer, eyeing them coldly. "Step away from the boy."

"You, monster!" Hermione shouted vehemently. "What are you going to do to him? Do you want him to be like you?"

Harry rested his right hand on top of Jonas's head. "No, that is not what I want. He will get the end that I will never have." His eyes ran over Hermione's appearance. "You should not be the one to talk, I think. I can see it in your eyes." Harry pushed Jonas behind him. "That look I see in your eyes is very familiar... I have seen it before. I remember." Harry paused and smiled. "I see it in the mirror ever time I look at my reflection."

Hermione shook her head. "We are not the same."

"Not yet." Harry whispered. "But if your eyes are any indication, someday you will be."

Harry shifted his eyes to Neville. "Do you also seek revenge? I killed your beloved Albus Dumbledore, after all."

Neville returned the gaze. "Yes, you did, but I have been told that you left the gun that did the deed behind."

"Don't fool yourself, Neville." Harry murmured. "I still have an arsenal of other weapons. There is no turning over a new leaf. The gun simply had lost its uses to me."

"Don't fool yourself, Harry."

Harry's head tilted, a feeble smile spread across his face. "But that is what I am gifted at, Neville. I trick myself to make my life seem worth living... but enough about me, Neville. You are trespassing here. Trespassers do not have long lives unfortunately."

"Once you told me that you would not kill me." Neville stated silently.

"There was a clause to that sentence that stated that unless my father ordered your death." Harry's face briefly showed regret. "I am sorry, Neville, but I did warn you to stop this foolishness. I truly am sorry." With that last admission, Harry pushed Jonas behind one of the pillars and pointed his wand first at Hermione.

""

Bellatrix heard the noise of spells being launched. It was possible that either Draco or Harry were removing them from their passageways, however she doubted this. A feeling of unease clouded her mind. She made her decision and began to leave her designated room. She was needed elsewhere. The sound of a pebble told her that perhaps her concerns were warranted.

"Your next move will be your last!" She screamed at the intruder.

"Don't shoot! It's me!" A familiar voice shouted.

"Marvolo?" She asked. "Why are you not guarding the Horcrux?" Her eyes narrowed in anger. "Your father will be greatly disappointed in your actions."

"The intruders are taken care of." Harry answered, raising his wand to level it to Bellatrix's chest.

"What are you doing!"

"I'm sorry, Bellatrix." A red light emitted from the wand, hitting Bellatrix's chest.

The Death Eater stumbled back in pain, watching horrified as the face before her morphed into a completely altered face. This face, too, was familiar. And it stunned her to see remorse in her eyes.

"I am sorry, my Aunt." Tonks whispered, looking down into the lifeless eyes that stared up at the ceiling. "But you had to be stopped. You were too dangerous to live."

""

Granger easily escaped his first spell. She had even surprised him with her quick reflexes, but they were not going to be fast enough. She dodged behind a pillar, panting so heavy that even Harry could hear her at a distance. His attention jerked to Neville, who was trying to get passed him to the Horcrux.

"That won't work." Harry sent an exploding charm toward Longbottom, causing the target to quickly retreat. Dodging an attack from Granger, Harry retreated behind a pillar. "So what now? You are without a plan." He asked pleasantly before seeking cover behind another pillar nearing his way toward Granger. His ears listened for movement but he caught nothing. They weren't moving. 'The fools,' he thought to himself. He now hid against the other side of Hermione's column. Removing a dagger from his robes, Harry moved quickly until he had it press against her throat.

"You want to kill me don't you, Granger." Harry whispered in her ear. "Why? What causes such hatred?"

Hermione tried in vain to see his face but the dagger at her throat prevented it. "You killed Ron!"

The dagger loosened slightly but remained. "Perhaps... perhaps not. Though it is true that it is because of me that he died."

Hermione jabbed her elbow into his stomach, causing Harry to release her. Her wand leveled with his face as he smiled at her. Harry dropped his wand, catching her off guard.

"Know your opponents, Granger." With a flick of his wrist, Harry got her wand to fly to him. He caught it in his hand. Harry peered casually at its wood surface, and then he snapped it in half. "You will thank me one day, Granger. Perhaps it would be more merciful to kill you as well, but something tells me that your part in this war has ended." He glanced at her eyes that teemed with tears. "Don't become something that you are not."

"Harry!" Jonas screamed, causing the black hair youth to jump. "He's going into the room!"

Harry tore across the floor, reaching the room as Neville tried to dissipate the barrier. He sent a dagger gliding toward Neville. The dagger itself just merely grazed Longbottom's left shoulder.

"Please, Harry, Voldemort mustn't continue."

"Perhaps," Harry whispered. "But I will decide that later."

"Neville, duck!" Tonks screamed, raising her wand toward the barrier. A clear beam struck causing the barrier to disintegrate, leaving the notebook bare to attack.

Harry's eyes flashed with wrath as he moved to strike Tonks. "I should have killed you in that hallway. It is a mistake I will rectify!"

"Neville, destroy it!"

A tap of his wand, Neville sent the book falling from its pedestal.

Harry immediately turned his wand away from Tonks and aimed it at the notebook, halting its fall, except the damage had already been done. The acid was too great for the book to withstand. And even as Harry sought to raise it, the notebook crumbled into oblivion. Ironically, it had been his father's own paranoia that had destroyed the book. His father should have known better than to protect his Horcrux with something that could have destroyed it. Voldemort's plan had been flawed. However, the Dark Lord still possessed one other thing that prevented his demise... a prophecy that could never be completed as long as he held Harry in his possession.

Pain filled Harry as he felt a bolt of magic hit his back. Without thinking, he sought to escape the room, where he was trapped by two of his foes and a pond of acid, both being ways that he refused to end his life. Harry pushed passed the Auror, knocking her backwards but not hard enough to give her an acid bath. He hid behind the pillar that held Jonas. The boy looked at him with horror, especially when he saw blood crawl down the pillar that Harry was resting against.

"You're not going to die, are you?" Jonas asked fearfully.

"Weeds don't die." Harry answered. 'Two options,' Harry thought. 'Neither is overly appealing.' The mission had failed. 'Now I can either try to kill them and perhaps die in the process or just let them go.'

Harry could hear their rapid footfalls. They were not even going to try to search him out. Sinking done, Harry rested his head on the bloodstained pillar. 'You can get up and kill them.' A voice taunted him. 'They will go to the staircase.' Pushing himself to his feet and turned to Jonas. "Try to keep up."

Tears blurred Harry vision as he ran down the corridor. His pace was greatly slowed by the fact that every step produced pain from his torn back. Once on the main landing, he watched as the trio fought the stairs on their attempt to escape. Raising his wand, Harry sent an exploding spell. Large pieces of the bridge fell into the chasm below, however the spell had not reached the span of staircase that housed the trespassers. Fierce anger coursed through Harry's veins as he watched them escape. 'I have failed you again, father.' Harry's back throbbed mercilessly. 'Why have I become so weak?'

"Harry," Draco called as he ran into view. He took a quick look at the fallen staircase before looking at his friend. "What happened?"

"The mission failed! That is what happened." Harry hissed angrily. "Where is Bellatrix?"

"She did come."

Harry looked down the center corridor. Tonks had only appeared later. 'Where had she been beforehand?' His heart suddenly stopped. Despite his injuries, Harry made it to the end of the tunnel in record

timing. Before him, he saw the fallen form of Bellatrix Lestrange. Her eyes staring at something that Harry could not see.

A frenzied chuckle escaped his mouth as he peered at the still form. Wiping his eyes with his hands, Harry looked once more at her. He knelt beside her, staring into her glazed eyes.

“What is it that you see?” Harry asked quietly. His eyes blinked, however tears would not come. He reached to close the eyes. “I never believed you would die. Perhaps, that is how it goes. We are mortal, but somehow I always expected you to be there.” His face distorted as he laid his torso over hers in an awkward hug. There was no warmth in the embrace, only a hard reality. “I won’t cry, because you would not have wanted them.”

Harry lifted her body into his arms and left the death chamber behind. Outside, Draco’s mouth dropped in shock when he saw the lifeless body of his aunt in Harry’s arms.

“Let’s leave, Draco.” Harry whispered. ‘No shame and no regrets.’

“”””

Voldemort stared at the corpse that was laid before him. A flood of varying emotions filled him. One of the few he could identify was fury, which filled his entire being. His eyes left the still form of Bellatrix Lestrange and moved to his son, whose face looked like marble. Voldemort was briefly thankful that Harry had finally allowed the gashes across his back to be healed. Wordlessly, Voldemort ran one of his long fingers down Bellatrix’s cheek.

“I am sorry, father.” Harry whispered, refusing to look at the scene before him.

“I was wrong to make those Horcruxes.” Voldemort answered. “One should not fear death. I refused to see the naturalness of it... though I loath it all the same.”

“Nymphadora Tonks is responsible for this.”

"You wish to hunt her down?" Voldemort asked, his eyes never leaving Bellatrix's face.

"Yes." An embittered voice replied.

Voldemort took one look at the fiery eyes and shook his head. "You will remain here, Harry."

"I will kill her!" Harry shouted.

"I need you as my right hand, Harry, especially now that Bellatrix is dead."

"I will only fail you."

"Everyone has their shortcomings, Harry, even you." Voldemort whispered. "No one is infallible. There is always one day when luck cruelly sides against you." A twisted smile spread across Voldemort's face. "That is all life is... it is all luck."

"It is cruel that we are given life and then in time all too short it is ripped from us." Harry said quietly.

"Isn't it?" The Dark Lord rose to his feet. "I will have need for you in the morning, but for right now, let's bury the dead... for that is all that is left to do."

## Chapter Twenty-Three: Harry's Inferno

The rhythm of Harry's absent-minded movements only served to further encrust his mind into an entranced state-of-being. He was completely unaware of the sweat that wandered into his eyes or down the contours of his body, soaking his clothing. He was oblivious even to his hair as it clung to his skin, framing his face. Instead, Harry's mind solely focused on the images that replayed through his mind constantly, like a broken record. The first image was him holding a dagger to Granger's throat followed closely by the Horcrux disintegrating, and then Bellatrix's limp body. He had filtered through the events that had taken place three months prior always searching for reason. The results had been unacceptable, and Harry blamed himself.

'I should have just slit her throat.' Harry thought has moved his body into another position, straining his muscles further. His eyes cleared as he pushed away the remnants of the failed mission. Harry, instead, focused on the mirror before him, searching for a flaw that would point to his failure.

'Why could I not kill her?' Harry wondered. 'Was it because she is Dorian's friend, or was it because of that look in her eyes... that so familiar look?' His lips parted as he repeated words that belonged to a time when he was much younger. "Pity is a weakness, it causes one to hesitate. It must be erased."

Sighing, Harry lowered his stance and leaned against the cool wall, catching his breath. His eyes landed on the clock, which showed that the hours had passed by. A pang hit his heart. If Bellatrix had been alive, she would have come and forced him to end his training before he had expended himself. But those times were passed.

Harry pushed away from the wall and moved to the far end of the training room, where a towel was waiting. Bringing its coarse surface to his face, he removed the sweat that plagued his face.

His thoughts changed direction before landing on his father. Harry was not a fool and knew that his father was furious at the loss of his Horcrux. The death of Bellatrix had served to dam his wrath. However, her death was no longer fresh. And Harry was slowly beginning to



feel his father's disfavor as were the Death Eaters. Many of them were already beginning to take advantage of his diminishing stature. After all, what good was an heir that proved to be weak? Harry snorted. 'I was defeated by children. Sure Neville was trained by Dumbledore, but that should not have mattered. The boy is inept.' The table that held the towel was tossed across the room. It hit with a loud crack as one of the legs gave way and fell aside. For the most part the table remained intact, except for the one leg. 'It will not stand on three legs.' It was all together fitting. Ironically, Bellatrix had been the firm leg that had held their odd family together. Without her, their 'table' was bound to shake. Empty tears strayed from his eyes.

Just as Dumbledore had prophesized, the walls were slowly pulling in around him. The irony never ceased to amuse him. Despite his hatred of headmaster, the old man had known a few things that Harry would never have given him credit for. Dumbledore had seemed to have had some gift of divination, or at the very least he had understood humanity, to some extent.

"Divination." Harry muttered. His mind briefly recalled his experience with the crystal ball at Hogwarts. It had slowly made him a believer in the 'art'. Trelawney had called it an art. Harry, however, entitled it a curse as it plagued his dreams with images and realistic pain. Quickly, he forced his mind to steady.

The door slowly opened. Harry shifted his eyes to the person that was slowly entering.

"Malfoy." He stated simply, watching the elder Malfoy disdainfully. "What do you want?"

The pure-blood wizard sneered. His voice took on a condescending tone. "Oh, how the mighty have fallen." He moved his hand in front of his nose to block the scent of sweat.

The adolescent bristled. Malfoy had been one of the Death Eaters that had quickly moved in on both his and Bellatrix's positions. "I have not fallen so far that I am not a threat, Malfoy. Do not forget that."

The elder's face lightened slightly. "Perhaps, earlier if you had said that I would have been stricken with fear, but not now. Your name has lost the dread it once held, Harry Marvolo."

"At least an illusion of that fright still remains. Even with its head severed a snake can still move... still bite." Harry glared at the man before him. "You may take what you want from me. My life is already empty."

"Hmm... perhaps." Malfoy's face remained neutral, as he shifted the conversation away from its earlier strain. "As it is, I am not here to converse with you for pleasure but simply inform you that your father wishes to see you."

Harry desperately sought to hide the surprised that arose inside him. His father had been openly avoiding him since the incident. The Dark Lord had even refused to use him in missions. "Where?"

"The main room." Lucius stated. "It seems even in your 'state', you still possess some measure of usefulness. Be careful, Marvolo, you just might find yourself expendable."

A dagger flashed into Harry's hand, and the tip touched the dent in Malfoy's throat. "What do you know?" His voice asked harshly.

Malfoy chuckled. "Paranoia? You are no better than a rabid dog, Marvolo." He paused, glancing down at the dagger. "Remove it. Your father would not be pleased if you go around killing his faithful followers."

"You have no understanding of loyalty."

"Neither do you, or else you would not hesitate in killing." Malfoy stepped backwards, and Harry lowered his dagger. "You have a child's mentality, Marvolo. The Dark Lord made it so. You could kill without understanding, but not now." Malfoy's voice lowered. "Because now you understood, and your deeds are eating you. It is unfortunate that you began your 'career' so early. Adults after all can just brush our deeds away. Heaven knows that I have." The Death Eater's lips twisted upwards in a smile. "I would not be late, Marvolo."

The Dark Lord, after all, is not a tolerant master. However, in this case, I believe he would prefer to wait until after you have showered.”

“I will be there in half an hour.”

“I will inform him.” Malfoy paused in the doorway. “Welcome back from exile, Marvolo, may it not be a short return.”

The senior Death Eater left Harry brooding. It was amazing how tables could turn so quickly. At one point, Lucius Malfoy would beg favors or place himself close to Harry, all the while loathing the child. But now he smelled weakness and like all animals he attacked it. And with Lucius’s action, a far greater misdeed had occurred. Harry had been deprived of one of his sole companions. No longer did Draco keep him company.

“This is the moment that you have desired.” He whispered to the mirror as he approached the door to the showering room, thinking of his meeting with his father. ‘But why does it not feel right?’ He did not ponder the last thought long before he turned the shower water on with a flick of his wrist. He would keep his suspicions in check. Malfoy’s words were meant to goad and taunt. Very seldom did they hold true meaning.

Discarding his exercise clothes, Harry stepped into the tiled cubicle and breathed with relief as the warm water streaked down his face and hair. The filth washed away, renewing his senses. Silently, he marveled at the affects showers had before lathering his body with soap. Once the excess soap had been wash aside, Harry turned the elegant knob, ceasing the water fall. His eyes caught a pair of robes in the far corner, which had been left by a house elf sometime during his brief shower. The velveteen feel of the robes as they settle on his body, only increase that euphoria of the shower. After a brief check of his appearance, Harry left to meet with his father.

It did not take long for Harry to navigate through the winding hallways and to reach the large meeting room, which was commonly referred to as the ‘main room’ since it was as far as most Death Eaters got into the fortress. When he pushed open the large doors, Harry was taken aback to find the room almost empty save for an ominous figure sitting in a throne.

“Father.” Harry stated in greeting.

The figure’s face remained downcast, giving no sign of recognizing his existence.

Harry’s teeth clenched as his anxiety threatened to overcome him. “You wished to see me.”

His father’s form nodded briefly, the air surrounding him almost tangible. “You have spent your time frugally. Tell me, Harry, have you found what you were searching for before that mirror. Did those months yield some greater answer?”

His face paled. “No.”

The Dark Lord raised his face so his eyes leveled Harry’s. “Pity... because your time is up.”

Subconsciously, Harry’s hand brushed against the dagger that was concealed in his robes.

A smile tugged on to Voldemort’s lips. “It is in your nature to be a murderer, Harry, just as the prophecy stated.” His eerie voice paused. “I am not your enemy, nor are you mine. You know this.”

Harry’s hand dropped. “You are giving me a mission, then?”

“Against my better judgment, I am. You have not grasped the control that you need to regain your former skill-.”

“I will not-.” His sentence was cut off abruptly by a scorching red beam. His hand clung to his left cheek, while his eyes gazed incredulously at his father.

“A reminder, my son. There cannot be order without punishment.” Voldemort stated, rising from the throne. His long stride carried him swiftly to a table. “Come.”

Harry’s hand never left his cheek as he crossed the room to the table that his father had pointed to. On the table, a map laid stretched upon

its wooden surface. The breath left Harry's throat as his eyes landed on the target marked with red ink.

"How?" The question was merely more than a whisper.

"Your duel with Dumbledore was more rewarding then anyone could have imagined." Voldemort answered, touching the building marked as the headquarters for the Order of the Phoenix. "The deceased headmaster was the secret keeper for the Order. With his death, the protections surrounding the building have been... let's say lax."

"Are they aware of this?" Harry questioned still uncertain as to where this conversation was leading.

The Dark Lord smiled. "No, they are not, according to our new spy. They have had three months to regroup. However, due of the death of their leader, they have been immobile. Hmph." Voldemort snorted. "Dumbledore kept most of the control for himself, so it is only to be expected that the Order would collapse with his death. They had been coddled for far too long. Sadly, their fate will be our own if I should be killed." His father's voice carried an edge.

Harry felt the silent accusing. He had made his father vulnerable. "That will not happen. The only one who can kill you is me. As you have stated, we are not enemies."

"So the prophecy states." His father eyed him curiously. "However, predicting the future is a hard business. The future is rarely ever straight forward when revealing its truths."

Harry smiled. "A greater truth was never spoken."

"Flattery?" His father said teasingly, and Harry felt the weight on his heart lift slightly.

"Never, father. I leave that to Lucius."

Voldemort nodded his head. "I would have it no other way." The Dark Lord's mood shifted to one more morose. "We are approaching the final operations of this war. Through your work, we have eliminated key members of government and others that would have stepped up

to build resistance movements. Perhaps, soon you will see the fruit of your labors for me, Harry.”

Harry’s eyes shifted away.

A sad smile crossed his father’s face. “Your sacrifices will have naught been spent in vain. None of our sacrifices will be for nothing... I will see to it.”

‘It must be great to have some greater vision.’ Harry thought solemnly as he stared at his father in wonder. ‘I can only imagine.’

“Now.” Voldemort brought Harry’s mind back to the task on hand. “You will be leading a small group of Death Eaters against the headquarters of the Order. Your actions there will merely be a feint, while I move the main force into positions throughout London. With your group drawing their attention, we should be able to achieve our purposes with relative ease.”

Harry watched as his father’s hand glided across the map, highlighting key locations. “Eventually, we will be overrun.” He stated.

Voldemort nodded. “That is the design.” He raised his hand to stop Harry’s arguments. “When they do succeed, Harry, you will draw them into our net. They will be caught in a crossfire.”

“And then the war is ours.”

“No.” Voldemort stated. “There will always be pockets of resistance. But, yes, we will have achieved the major victory. One can only achieve a final battle when you can control the mind and soul of the people. Unfortunately, such a feat is impossible.”

An uneasy feeling rose in Harry’s chest. “What if the plan fails?”

“What are your thoughts?”

“I feel that we are forgetting something.” Harry’s eyes narrowed as he delved into thought.

"I have thought of every factor. And the only one that I cannot correct is human error."

His father's gaze burned into him, causing Harry to flinch. "I will be prepared." He paused hesitantly. "I need to take care of something before the attack."

"You have this evening, Harry."

"Thank-you, father."

Voldemort nodded his head absently, keeping his keen eyes on his son. "Do as you will."

Harry gave a short nod before exiting the room. As he started toward his destination, his heart did something that it had not done for a long. It clenched in sorrow at the unavoidable reality that faced him. One could not scoff at fate, what was meant to be would be. But even this truth could not relieve the tightening feeling that enveloped his heart. 'Hmph, how ridiculous have I become?'

Harry's steps took him to the right, and he proceeded down a private hallway that was relatively undecorated besides a few large crests that had belonged to the house of Salazar Slytherin. At the end of the corridor, a door of deep ebony waited. His hand hovered above the silver antique knob, as Harry paused in doubt. His mind raced searching for some form of stability from the uncertainty that gnawed at him like cankers. Biting his lower lip, Harry grabbed firmly onto the handle and pushed it downwards.

His eyes darted across the interior of his room. Where once there had been clean floor was now littered with crayons that composed all the colors of the spectrum, along with sloppy drawings in which the subject matter was questionable. The walls that had once been bare were covered in these drawings. The drawings belonged to a child that had yet to discover the proportions of the human body. In the corner, there was a pile of teddy bears. Even though he had just left childhood behind, Harry did not have a clue what a normal child would desire so Jonas had received numerous teddy bears.

Jonas, by now, had just abandoned his latest masterpiece and was looking brightly at Harry.

“Clean up, Jonas, and pack your things.” As always, Jonas obeyed, though he continually stole glances in his direction.

As Jonas busied himself, Harry peered nonchalantly down at the latest picture. His jaw loosened. There were simply two stick figures on the yellow construction paper. One had black hair and green eyes while the other had yellow hair and gray eyes. In wobbly handwriting at the top the picture was titled simply ‘Harry and Me’.

“Do you like it?” Jonas asked from behind him.

Harry nodded brusquely. “I think it’s your best so far.”

The boy beamed. “You can have it, if you like.”

“Thank you.” His voice was a mere whisper, before changing the subject. “You have everything.”

“Yes.”

“Good, let’s go.” Harry turned to leave the room, but Jonas’s voice stopped him.

“Where are we going? And why haven’t you packed?”

‘Too observant for his own good.’ Harry thought briefly. “I will be away soon, and you won’t be able to come.”

“Why?”

“Did you honestly want to follow me your whole life?” A slight smile crept onto Harry’s lips. “You will be far better off without me.” Harry grabbed the boy’s bag and hoisted it over his shoulder. ‘Who knows you might even survive this war.’

Tears started to fill the boy’s eyes. “You don’t like me.”



Harry shrugged. "If I did not like you, would I have allowed you to come this far with me?" Jonas's watery eyes did not change, and were still reflected betrayal. "Come, we do not have much time."

He heard the sluggish steps of the youth behind him, trying desperately to slow the unavoidable departure.

"Pick up your feet." Harry called over his shoulder. The sound of faster footsteps reached his ears as they turned into the main corridor. They would leave the compound via a little known exit. It would draw less attention.

"I don't-." Jonas began when they reached the door.

"Quiet." Turning the doorknob, Harry exited into the cold. Jonas, as always, followed.

Harry's head grasped his wand, pulling it toward his face. Within seconds, his features began to alter; his hair becoming blonde, and his facial features began to slightly mirror Jonas's. Holding out his hand, Harry waited for his charge to grab it. "Hold on tight." Of course, the boy already knew that. Jonas had apparated with him countless times, but regardless Harry still felt it was better to remind.

The scenery changed drastically into a small town. Harry had been here countless times. It was a Wizarding town that didn't even deserve to have the title of 'town', being as it was composed of a handful of house and then one pub, called the Clay Pipe. Harry eyes shifted down, wordlessly taking in the unimpressed look on Jonas's face.

"When we enter the pub, don't look at anybody. Just follow me."

Uncertainty filled the youth's face.

"It can be a little rough." Harry stated. "For all purposes, that pub is a hub for 'unsavory' sorts... those who simple wish to bury themselves. They will not tolerate a kid, so stay out of their way, and we should have no difficulties."

Slowly, they approached the four-walled tavern with its peeling paint. Harry opened the door, ushering in Jonas first his hand resting on the youth's shoulder to prevent the child from wandering. The eyes of the patrons rose to greet the newcomers, scrutinizing ever detail.

"The fireplace is in the back." Harry whispered lowly.

"Where am I going?"

Harry could feel the fear radiating from the boy. "Someplace safe."

Awkwardly, the pair maneuvered through the tables.

"The fireplace is for paying customers only!" The bartender bellowed.

A dagger flipped into Harry's hand, causing the bartender's face to instantly pale.

"Mar-."

"Some names are better left unspoken." Harry turned, pulling Jonas along with him.

Away from prying eyes, Harry set down Jonas's bag. Then reaching into his robes, he removed an envelope that Harry had written a few weeks beforehand when he had first decided on this course of action. Written on the front was simply 'Potters'.

"I'm not going to lie to you, Jonas. The people, who I am sending you to, don't know you are coming." Harry leaned against the rustic fireplace, staring down at his companion. "But if all their words are true, they will probably be sappy enough to take you in."

"Why do I have to leave?" Jonas asked quietly.

Harry closed his eyes. "Being with me is not the safest place to be." His mind briefly flashed an image of Bellatrix. "Especially, now. Things are about to change, Jonas, and it is best that you are not around when they do."

"Will I see you again?"

Jonas looked up startled when he realized that Harry was now squatting at his level so he could look directly into his eyes.

“What are these?” Harry said, as he wiped away tears that rolled down Jonas’s cheeks. “Save those for later.” ‘You might need them.’ Harry thought briefly.

“Will we-.”

“Perhaps.” Harry answered as he returned to his normal stature. “I do not wish to give you false hopes.” His hand reached up to the mantle and into a pot, retracting it with a handful of Floo Powder. Harry, then, threw it into the hearth.

Harry motioned Jonas into the fireplace, and when he stepped into the threshold, Harry spoke again.

“If the Potters start to do stupid things, like resist Voldemort, leave. Do you understand?”

The boy nodded.

“Then all you need to say is Potters, Godric Hollow. Oh, and give them this.”

Harry turned and left the back room, when he heard the boy say his destination. It was necessary; anything else would have been reckless on Harry’s part. Moving to the bar, Harry sat in of the tall stools. Leaning forward, He caught the bartender’s attention. “I trust you haven’t done anything regrettable.” Harry whispered.

“Of course not!” The man said hurriedly. “How about a drink... on the house, of course.”

“Give me something strong.”

It was not long before an amber substance was placed before him. Raising the shot, Harry stared at ‘his’ reflection. In it, he saw what the child would grow to be. ‘He will live, even if I don’t.’ He blinked, forcing the tight knot in his throat down. ‘I am lost in a dark wood, and I just turned away my divine intervention.’ The cup touched his lips,

and the liquid burned his throat. 'I seem to enjoy the dark woods, at least.' The glass hit the counter empty.

## Chapter Twenty-Four: Canta per Me ne Addio

The Floo commute ended with Jonas's stomach feeling queasier than usual. His young mind wondered if it had to do with the tears that had refused to stop. He thought back to Harry's words and quickly cleaned his face, and uneasily looked at his surroundings that were very different than those of the fortress. It reminded him more of the townhouse that his family had lived in before they had disappeared. In the living area, there was a red sofa along with an assortment of chairs.

Jonas did not hear any sounds as he stood in front of the fireplace. It was already late. However, it was obvious that someone was awake as the lights were still on. So the youth sat quietly on the sofa, leaning back into its comforting cushions.

His tired eyes rested on the Wizarding photos of the family. The one man looked almost exactly like Harry. 'Perhaps, they're related.' Jonas yawned widely as he thought. He lay across the sofa's length and closed his eyes, forgetting that he was in a foreign environment in which he was alone.

" " "

Dorian shoved his hands deeper into his coat pockets in hopes of protecting them from the crisp air. His cap was pulled down covering his ears as he walked with Neville and Hermione, who had once again sought his help. He had listened wordlessly as Neville had explained to him the situation that the Order and Ministry were facing.

"We need everyone, Dorian." Hermione stated calmly. Her eyes, however, refused to meet his.

"I'm tired of this," he answered abruptly. Neville and Hermione seemed surprised at his sudden tone shift.

"Surely, you don't want Voldemort to win, Dorian? You're mother is muggle-born. Don't think that Voldemort will ignore her existence, simply because she is the biological mother of his 'son'." Neville stated candidly. "Harry can't always protect your family. Eventually, he will cross the line... either that or Harry will lose his value. Don't

doubt, Dorian, that when that happens he will be discarded by Voldemort. It would be too risky for Voldemort to keep Harry alive, especially when Harry is the only person who can destroy him.”

“Harry wouldn’t allow himself to meet such an end, especially if what you told me is correct regarding that child.” Dorian looked upward, admiring the stars that were so clear this evening. “He has something that needs his protection... I doubt that he would allow himself to die so needlessly.”

Hermione frowned. Her eyes looking especially weary as she spoke. “Dorian, we do not know the relationship between Harry and this boy. It could very well be that the child was taken by Voldemort, and is simply being trained by Harry. There is nothing to show that Harry actually cares for the child.”

“Harry could very well be training his replacement.” Neville added despondently. “Voldemort has, after all, had great success with using children to carry out his different ‘tasks’. It would not be surprising if he tried it again.”

The house was coming into view, once more. Dorian found himself excited about the prospect of sitting before the fire with a cup of warm tea. His body really needed to unthaw in more than one way after this walk.

Beside him, Neville sighed, perhaps knowing that he had failed to convince his friend. “At least think about it, Dorian. Do as your conscience dictates.”

Dorian smiled. “I have always done that... much to Professor McGonagall’s distaste.”

Neville chuckled. “We will see you later, Dorian. Perhaps by then, you will have reached your own decision.”

“Either that, or the answer will be the same.” Dorian quipped.

“Please, think about it.” Hermione asked silently.

"I will." His voice relayed the sincerity he felt. "Well, see you guys around... at least I had better see you two around." His companions easily understood the hidden meaning behind the calm statement.

"You will." Neville stated, clapping Dorian on the back. "Come on, Hermione. Have a good evening, Dorian."

Dorian wished them the same, and then grasped the golden door. When he pushed open the door, the warmth that hit his chilled face was welcomed. 'The conversation with Neville and Hermione went too long,' he thought as he walked toward the kitchen. He was immediately thankful that his parents had left the lights on for him. Once in the quaint kitchen, he filled the tea kettle with water and left it on the stove, which his mother had refused to be without, until it boiled. He, then, poured the hot substance into a blue ceramic mug, in which he had already placed the teabag. For such a simple thing, watching the brown liquid mix with the water had always made Dorian marvel. When the tea was fully brewed, he swiftly removed the bag and then put in three spoons of sugar.

His eyes shifted to the clock that hung on the wall. The arms revealed that he had been talking with his friends for the better part of two hours, and it was already eleven thirty. Wrapping his fingers around the warmth of the mug, he walked absentmindedly into the living room. His mind was not on his destination, rather resting on the dilemma that had been handed to him. The points that Neville and Hermione had made were valid, and there was no way that Dorian was ready to just allow Voldemort to gain dominance. However, to stand against Voldemort meant he would have to fight Harry as well. Dorian was still not ready to do that. 'Not just yet.'

Carefully, he began to sit on the sofa not wanting to spill his tea. However, something did not feel right. Suddenly, he felt something that was not the sofa.

"Bloody Hell!" Dorian exclaimed as he suddenly jumped to his feet, dropping the mug, which promptly shattered into pieces when it connected with the carpeted floors, its hot contents hitting Dorian's clothes and the furniture in the room.

Behind him, he could hear the sound of movement as a small child moved to the far end of the sofa. Dorian looked into the wide-eyed expression of the child before something in his mind seemed to click. He matched the description that Hermione had given, regarding the child that had been with Harry. 'But what is he doing here.' Dorian's eyes shifted nervously around the room, but there was no sign of his older brother. Hermione's thoughts about the child came into mind. 'Could he possibly be an assassin?'

"Who are you?" The child asked quietly.

Dorian smiled inwardly. "You're in my family's home... one would think that that question belongs to me."

"Jonas." The boy reached beside him, causing Dorian to freeze. "Are you 'Potters'?" Jonas asked, holding out a letter.

"I am one of them." Dorian answered, grasping the envelope. He faintly recognized the handwriting belonged to Harry. After a brief pause, Dorian tore open the envelope and pulled out a sparsely written letter.

*'I have a favor to ask. It is a relatively easy task, in which you only need to watch the kid. I can't do it anymore, as events are about to get 'interesting'. Stay away from trouble, if you catch my drift. I am not in the saving people business, and it would be doubtful that I would be able to help if you were to get involved. You have been warned. – Harry*

*It is unlikely we will meet again.'*

Dorian read the words mutely. 'Another attack, uh.' He thought numbly.

"I, suppose, you will be staying with us for awhile." Dorian stated more than asked. "We have plenty of room. I will clean up this mess first and then in the morning I will introduce you to my mother and father."

"Did Harry say when he was getting me?"



Dorian's jaw went lax. "No, he didn't. Just said it might be awhile... he couldn't guess."

"Oh." The boy looked disappointed, and sighed. "He didn't tell me, either." Jonas swung his legs so that they dangled off the sofa. "How do you know Harry?"

Dorian looked away, his hazel eyes looking far-away. "He was my brother."

""

Harry's eyes felt heavy as he stood beside his father. Last night he had spent a large quantity of his time at the tavern, before arriving outside the fortress at around twelve. He had then spent half of an hour tearing down the drawings that decorated his room, shoving them into the dark recesses of his dresser. It was the only way he was going to be able to sleep that night. After hours of trouble sleep, he had woken and gone to his father, thankful that he did not have a hangover.

"You are certain that the Order is having a meeting today?" Harry questioned, staring at the information in his hand. "This had better not be guess work." His eyes turned into glare as they leveled on Lucius Malfoy.

"I assure you, Marvolo, that this information comes from within the Order itself." Lucius' usual drawled voice explained. The smug look on his face caused Harry's stomach to turn with suspicion. "As a matter of fact, a house elf that serves the noble House of Black came to my dear wife with this information. You can trust him, as house elves are more loyal to the house than their master... and I can attest to the fact that this particular house elf bears no loyalty to its owner... a filthy blood traitor."

Voldemort eyed his son. "I have no doubt in this information... the house elf has proved off use before when Severus hadn't."

Harry silently conceded to Malfoy. "You want to carry out this attack with so many of them assembled and during the day." He stated contemplatively.

"We want as many members of the Order that we can get in one place. It will leave less to form a resistance. They will also be more overconfident when they think they have the upper hand."

Harry nodded. "Then use the crowded streets to serve as a restraint on them... they won't want to harm innocent lives."

"It is the perfect plan, my Lord." Lucius complimented.

"Save you flattery." The Dark Lord said absently, waving his hand as if to erase Malfoy's words. "Harry, I have assembled a taskforce of eight Death Eaters to accompany you on the primary attack of the Headquarters of the Order. Remember you are to draw them into our net... use the populace as a means to an end. It will be justified in the end."

"As you wish, father," Harry bowed. "Have the Death Eaters meet me a few blocks away from the target." Harry pointed to the mentioned location on the map that draped the table.

"It will be done." His father's eyes rested lightly on him for a moment. "After you 'deliver' our message to the Order, you are to send your men to antagonize them. You, Harry, are to first go to this location to pick up a few things that will be useful to you, and then you are to come directly to me. I will not take accuses if you miss our meeting."

Harry smirked. "I wouldn't miss it for the world." With the words just out of his mouth, he turned and left the main room. He had places to be. Besides, there was no time to be overwhelmed with sentiments.

""""

Time's continuous movements were slowly making Harry nauseated. He pulled his robes closer to his person, as he prepared himself for his entry. Harry would enter first as he did not have the Dark Mark branded on his arm. A slight smile graced his lips as he played images of his entry through his mind. It would be stupid, but humorous all the same. Beside him, Harry heard a Death Eater approach. Turning, he did not recognize the face of the one who had approached him.

"You're new." Harry stated. His voice maintained a bored quality.

The man shrugged, his bizarre brownish, red eyes seemed to burn. "My talents were seen as useful for this sort of task. Needless to say, I find this whole endeavor to be amusing."

Harry frown deepened further. He could recognize the insane glint in the man's eyes; he had seen it often enough in Death Eaters but never to this extent. "Who recruited you?"

The man brushed his hand through his auburn hair. "His name escapes me... I make it a habit to forget those who help me when I take a step up in the world. I find it gives me less of a conscience later on."

"Hmm," Harry murmured. "And what is your part in this mission, Mist-"

"Reynard, Cree." The man stated. "My job is to wreak havoc wherever I go."

'Why is this creature here?' Harry asked incredulously, but of course no answer would come. "I trust you will follow orders."

"To the tee," The man stated, putting on his Death Eater's mask as if to emphasize the point.

Harry's eyes changed to the different Death Eaters who were more recognizable. Among the group, he recognized both Crabbe and Goyle seniors. The others, though familiar faces, only brought blanks to Harry's mind when he tried to remember their names.

"You are to wait, until I return." Harry stated, quickly working his glamour charm, taking the most common form of Nymphadora Tonks. 'It's only fair.' Harry thought to himself a sick smile refusing to leave his face. "You know where you are to be," Harry said before leaving the Death Eaters.

He walked calmly down the sidewalk. Occasionally, people would stare at his hot pink hair, but it was only to be expected. The female Auror most likely always attract this amount of attention. Turning

down the street, Harry removed a piece of crumbled paper that had been partially burned, written on it was the location of Number Twelve Grimmauld Place. As he read over the paper, ahead of him a building appeared. The house-elf had been quite useful after all.

Harry grasped the doorknob and pulled the front door open. When he entered the house, he could already hear the meeting that was occurring in the kitchen. Taking his wand, he removed the glamour charm and proceeded forward. 'Attack the order and the ministry will respond... and then we have them all in one spot like fish in a barrel.' Harry paused before he opened the next door. He cleared his face of all expression and simply drew in a breath as he pushed open the door.

He leaned against the doorway and watched calmly as McGonagall's face took on a look of sheer horror. Others soon turned, following McGonagall's line of vision. Numerous gasps filled the large room as members instantly recognized Harry's face. He, personally, recognized the faces of the remaining Weasleys, except for the daughter who was not present, Lupin, Black, Tonks, Longbottom, and his friend Granger. Many wands were leveled on him immediately.

"You all look so surprised." Harry whispered, keeping his face a blank slate.

"Why have you come here?" McGonagall's voice carried across the room to him. "What does Voldemort want?"

Harry's eyes moved about the room. "This place hasn't changed much, I suppose. Though there are less people here than when I was brought here. Not surprising really, the Order seems to have taken a drop in members. Most are dead, probably." Out of the corner, Harry continued to monitor the wands that were trained on him.

"Say your message before you die you, insolent whelp!" Moody roared, rising to his feet. The chair he had been seated in landed on its back. "Speak!"

Harry waved his hand aimlessly and yawned. "What do you think he wants, Mad-eye? What has he always wanted? Except this time, he is about to achieve his goals."

"You don't sound overly thrilled, Harry." Sirius said, his features betraying his thoughts of hope and dread.

The door frame became uncomfortable and Harry straightened himself. "It's not my goal... nothing but motions anymore, really."

"Then way?" Sirius asked blatantly. "Stop this!"

Harry closed his eyes, a crazed smile covering his face. His emerald eyes glinted with flames when they reappeared. "I will stop when I am dead."

The first shot came from an unknown member of the Order. After the events of what would occur in the kitchen, no one would ever know his identity as everything spiraled out of control. Just as quickly as the spell had propelled toward Harry, it was sent clear across the room as it impacted with Harry's invisible shield, which slightly rippled on impact.

"Is that the best you can do?" Harry asked. "And you always believed you would win this war? You are so naïve!" The last sentence came from clenched teeth as Harry raised his wand and sent a blast of his own, causing the debris from the floor to shoot into the air.

More spells were being thrown his way now. Harry knew that his shielding technique would only last for a time. Besides, it was not his mission to eradicate the entire Order of the Phoenix at this moment in time. Though, personally, Harry believed that it would have sent a more powerful message to kill them here at their Headquarters, but that did not lead the Ministry and Aurors into a haze of crossfire.

Casting aside a bright purple spell, Harry bowed slightly to the disgruntled Order members. "I was only the messenger," he stated over the chaos that surrounded him. "We are waiting ... you have been informed."

Harry spun on his heels as he lurched out of the kitchen, using his shield to protect his back. There was silence behind him when he exited the door. Harry knew that they were shocked by what had just occurred, but he also understood that they would come. Once outside,

he instantly apparated back to his Death Eaters. Many of which were leaning idly against the brick wall behind them.

Harry glared at them, bringing them instantly to attention. "Taskforce B, the Order will by now searching the surrounding area for me. You know what to do... make sure they find their way, but not before the Ministry arrives."

The small pops were all that Harry needed to know to be sure that they had understood their orders. He, on the other hand, was to meet with his father rather than harass the Order members. Raising his wand, Harry apparated to his next point: a run-down factory, which was a mere minutes from where the bloodbath would occur. At this spot, Harry would find a mask to shield his face to prevent himself from being singled out. There would also be a set of his customary daggers, waiting for his use.

The interior of the factory was filled with broken glass, dust, and cobwebs. The machinery was sparse and in between. Their metal surfaces were covered with the orange-ish tinge of rust caused by the leaks from the unkempt roof. His eyes swept the rather large room, noting that there was no one waiting for him not that he had been expecting anyone. Harry step forward toward one of the machines and looked beside it. His equipment was there just as his father had told him it would be. However, Harry could not put down that sense that he had tuned to perfection over his short life, in which he could tell that something was dreadfully amiss. It felt as if someone was watching his every move. His eyes surveyed the area once more before he began to place his daggers within his robe.

Harry bent down to pick up the last remaining item. As his hands grasped the Death Eater mask, sheer pain spread through his body. He had no control of his body movements as the blast knocked him forward. His body seemed suspended in air as he felt himself continuing to soar through the air. The dreamlike sensation was brought to an instant end when the wall and Harry connected. He hit the ground roughly coughing in pain. His eyes slowly rose to see a Death Eater standing a fair distance away from him. Anger shook through Harry's body.

“Take off your mask!” He shouted

The Death Eater shrugged before complying. The face was acutely recognizable as the Death Eater, Cree Reynard.

“You don’t seem too shocked, Harry.” Cree stated. “And you haven’t even known me long.”

Harry mind worked fast as his mouth tried to form words. “Wh-o hired you?”

Cree shook his head in dismay. “Tsk- tsk...You’re an assassin, Harry! You should know that one never betrays a client.” The assassin took long stride, bringing him deadly close to Harry. “My client is just someone who has lots to gain by your death, no matter which way this war turns out. One could say that he is merely covering all his bases.”

Harry looked away, his clouded mind desperately trying to find a way out. His mouth opened. “Then I will have to force you to reveal your client... before I kill you!”

Forcing himself to his feet, Harry lunge to his right with his wand ready. He could hear a spell barely miss him as he sought cover behind a lone machine that had been apart of what Muggles called an assembly line. Bits of the metal disintegrated as another blast hit.

“Come, Harry!” Cree was undeniably smirking. “You shouldn’t be hiding... what would your father say, if he saw his little assassin hiding like a scared rat.”

Another blast hit the archaic machine, causing it to creak with distress. Behind it, Harry reached into his torn and blood-stained cloak with his left hand and removed a glinting dagger. In one swift move, he rolled out from his hiding spot and heaved the dagger at his attacker’s throat. Shock flashed through Harry’s body when in return he saw another dagger hurling toward him. The edged blade grazed his cheek before it continued past him, hitting the floor with a clang.

Harry's eyes quickly caught Reynard, and realized that his dagger had mostly missed the target, though there was a very small trickle of crimson trailing down the contours of his neck.

Cree smiled wickedly, his white teeth appearing so perfectly. "Come, Harry, is that the best you have."

Harry shrugged as he inched slowly to the left. "At least my moves are original," Harry hissed. "You're nothing more than an imitator."

"Tsk, Harry" The assassin retorted, inching to the right. "It's a competitive market... it does one good to check out the competition. When you see something you like, emulate it. You should feel honored!"

Harry snorted. "And how would that work?"

"How should I know, Harry?" Cree raised his polished, mahogany wand. "All I know is that you're not dead... at least not yet!"

Two beams connected in the air as the two combatants cast their spells at the same time. Rather than remaining connected, the two beams ricocheted off each other, explosively hitting opposite walls. Debris sprayed the room, causing both combatants to move to avoid the clumps of broken up brick and concrete.

"Isn't this fun, Harry," Cree shouted over the noise.

Harry's face remain scrunched in concentration as he quickly shifted to his right to avoid a spell that Reynard had sent in his direction. In return, Harry screamed out the Avada Kedavra, filling it with his wrath. A rusted out conveyor belt that stood between him and his enemy disintegrated at the power behind it.

"Come now, Harry," Cree said a lopped sided smile taking precedence on his face. "How are you going to find out who the traitor is, if you kill me?"

"You, bastard," Harry said, sending **Cruciatus Curse** in response. "I am going to make you suffer."



"The Dark Lord would be so proud," Cree said with mock sincerity after sending Harry's curse harmlessly to the side. "You have finally assumed his enjoyment for the slow and painful bleeding of someone's life. There is actually passion behind your curses."

"Shut up!"

The atmosphere in the factory darkened considerably as Harry's power began to flux. He didn't even bother to raise his wand, because he did not need to. A spiral of fire careened at the startled assassin. Only at the last moment did it register in Cree's stunned mind to drop to the floor.

Harry watched as the fire plowed over Cree, though it was now harmless as the latter had erected a shield. Pain returned to Harry's back, reminding him that he did not have long before the blood loss would begin to affect his reflexes. He raised his wand, his mouth parting to say the magic words that brought death with a brief flicker of green light. Reynard's shield could not save him from the Avada Kedavra.

When Harry's mouth formed the 'ka' sound, he suddenly froze. His wand dropped to the cement floor. The piercing pain in his stomach area had stopped all sound from exiting his mouth. Reynard's wild throw had actually hit him near his left hip. The assassin arose and glanced at Harry.

"Who would have expected that to hit, aye?" Cree rose to his feet as Harry's hand grasped the dagger. "I wouldn't pull it out, if I was you," Cree advised him as he lifted his wand, leveling it with Harry's head.

Harry sneered. "You're going to regret this."

"Somehow, Harry, I don't think I will." Cree continued to move forward. "To get off a lethal Killing Curse you need that wand, and you won't be able to get it in time before I kill you."

Harry stiffened as he fought the urge to give into the blood loss that was slowing his mind and body. "I can beat you to my wand." Before he even finished, Harry began to move.

Over his heartbeat, Harry could hear Cree starting to shout the killing curse. His hands grasped the wand, and he rolled a hard right. Inches from where his wand had laid, there was a small crater, but Harry did not have the time to think about how lucky he had been. He had to move before his aggressor could get off another blast. The word 'flank' came to Harry's mind as he ran dodging in between what cover he had to work with, trying to get behind Reynard. However, Cree guessed his tactics and began to follow after him.

Harry ducked beneath a machine and started to turn, while sending a cutting spell at his pursuer. The man behind him screamed in pain. Harry briefly looked to see that there was a clean hole through Reynard's left shoulder through which blood seeped. Seeing an opportunity Harry took it, wiping out two daggers with his left hand. The first hit the man in the thigh, while the other Cree successfully managed to dodge, though he was missing a bit out of his robes afterwards. With his right hand, Harry began the next wave of his assault with his wand.

The tables turned quickly on Reynard as he frantically tried to create shields that were strong enough to withstand the onslaughts that Harry was putting forth. Each time he made one, it was just as easily dismantled.

The two were soon locked into an aggressive duel with the stakes higher than before. If one should falter, that dueler was dead. Superiority was passed often between the two as they neared the wall to the far left with its long rows of windows. Vaguely, Harry could make out the sounds of the battle which was now occurring in London.

Due to his split second of distraction, Harry was slow to raise his shield. Fortunately, what he did manage to construct was strong enough to take the blunt impact. However, it did not stop Harry from being pushed into the wall.

Cree's feral eyes glinted and yet another spell pounded Harry into the wall.

"You're going to die, Harry." Cree whispered, holding Harry against the brick with his spell. "You're going to die here... in this dump of a place. You'll be lucky if they ever find your body, though I suppose

the stench will bring them here eventually.” The man paused. “How does it feel? You’re only going to hear two words before it’s over... no, chances for a reprieve or escape just like your victims.”

Concentrating his magic, Harry prepared himself. “It doesn’t end here.” He paused, his eyes briefly flicking toward the window directly to his right. “We will meet up again, Cree.”

With a burst of wand-less magic, Harry dissolved Reynard’s hold on him and flung himself out the window. The pavement was closer than to his liking as he had only been on the third floor. Holding tightly on to his wand, Harry apparated before he could hit the black pavement below him. Above Cree simply watched as his target disappeared. His client was not going to be happy, but then again the Dark Lord’s heir was badly wounded. That back wound will kill him, Cree thought momentarily before leaving the factory.

Miles away Harry landed hard on his back. The sounds that greeted him alerted him that he was in midst of the battlefield. Trying to rise to his feet, he heard feet rushing toward him.

Please, let it be Death Eaters, Harry thought before he suddenly froze. What if it had been my father who hired the assassin? Seeds of doubts began to form. His grip on his wand doubled as he turned to look behind him. ‘Damn’ was the only thing intelligent enough that he could think when he saw two Aurors approach him.

“That’s-,” one began before the other cut him off.

“Stupi-,” the second began his curse as he raised his wand.

Harry turned himself as he rose rapidly. “Avada Kedavra!”

The smartest of the pair dropped heavily to the ground followed closely by his partner.

“Morons,” Harry muttered. “They shouldn’t even be allowed to touch a wand let alone practice magi-.” A moan broke off his sentence.

Only now did Harry take the time to examine his wounds. He gritted his teeth as he pulled pieces of his tattered robes away from the back

wound. When his eyes took in the amount of damage, he involuntarily shuttered. He would need a drought to fix that. He ignored the cuts and bruises from his fall out the window, instead focusing on the dagger that still protruded from him. With one swift yet painful pull Harry removed it, causing him to flinch. Using his robe, he forced the bleeding to slow, before healing the wound with his wand.

Straightening himself, Harry took in his surroundings with more attention than he had before. His mind began to picture where his father was, and then he apparated a second time.

He was thankful this time to have landed on his feet rather than as before. Looking around at his surroundings, he was glad to see his father's familiar ominous form in front of him, his back turned toward Harry. Beyond the Dark Lord, the battle was taking place not that far away from the base of the hill.

"Harry, why are you late?" Voldemort asked as he began to turn at the small pop. "What happened to you?"

"I was attacked." Harry stated bluntly. "It appears that someone hired an assassin to kill me."

Voldemort's eyes narrowed. "It seems we have a traitor in our midst... in my inner circle, even. Who was the assassin?"

"A Death Eater, who accompanied me... called Cree Reynard." Harry slumped to the ground trying to pull his energy up.

"Cree Reynard?" A knowing light abruptly appeared in Voldemort's eyes. He knew who the traitor was... the same person who had recommended Reynard. Rage coursed through his body, even more so when he scanned over the wounds that had been inflicted on Harry.

"Is this Reynard dead?" He asked his son. He had his answer even before Harry responded by the look on the adolescent's face.

"I had to abandon that fight," Harry stated calmly.

Voldemort nodded briefly. "You are to return to the fortress. We can handle things here without your help."

Harry's jaw clenched. "I am not leaving your side."

The Dark Lord felt his eyes narrowing. Harry was daring to defy his orders... this was an unexpected development. Perhaps he has found his own balance, Voldemort mused.

Harry watched warily as his father just stared at him, assessing him as if he were an antique that he was considering to purchase.

"What do you think you can do, Harry?" Voldemort asked. Now he was placing him as his true equal. "We will win this battle. Already the Order and Aurors are being destroyed." The Dark Lord motioned his protégé over to his vantage point of the battle. "You're seriously injured... you will only be in the way."

His father's words caused Harry's back to go ridged. "There is one thing that I have learned about battles: they can go either way... there are no guarantees." Harry pushed against the fatigue. "I will not leave."

Voldemort felt his eye brow lift. He had always found Harry to be intriguing, but at this moment he was even more so. The darkened heart, which beat within Voldemort, wanted to see how far the youth could be pushed before he crumbled. However, a larger portion of him wanted the youth to retreat to the safety of the fortress where he could heal.

"You would defy me?" The Dark Lord asked.

"Yes," Harry whispered, waiting for his father's retribution that never came. Instead, his father continued to take in his determined features.

Finally, Voldemort snorted. "Turn around," he instructed. When Harry complied, he set about closing the wound, knowing full well that it would not hold. He took away the pain that would return with force as soon as the wound reopened.

"Thank-you," Harry stated.

"There is no need for such meaningless things." His father replied shortly. Besides, he thought to himself, what I did was not in your best interests. "It is time we survey our situation more closely. When all is done, there will be a purge amongst the Death Eaters."

Harry looked at his father out of the corner of his eye. "You didn't hire the assassin, then."

"You know me better than that, Harry." The Dark Lord did not stop in his steps forward. "If I wanted you dead, I would kill you myself... not hire someone else to do it in my stead. I have that much respect for you."

Harry nodded not trusting himself to speak. Instead, he gripped tighter on to his wand, preparing himself for the first battle that he would enter with his father. He was bound to remember this day, though he could not vanquish that little seed of doubt that had been festering for days now. His encounter with Reynard had only caused it to sprout further.

A fool who had broken through the original net spotted the pair upon their entry into the fray. Harry moved to stand between the Auror and his father before killing him with one use of the killing curse. Without paying further attention to the cadaver, the pair moved on.

As they walked on, Harry could not help but to imagine how the peaceful London day had been turned into a nightmare. The ground was littered with corpses and not just of combatants but with civilians, who had simply been in the wrong place at the wrong time. Out of the corner of his eye, Harry saw a busted porcelain doll, which had probably been dropped by a child when she began her escape from the battlefield. Its glass eyes seemed to follow Harry, and it bothered him. The dolls bright blue eyes seemed to bare that same twinkle that Dumbledore's eyes had once held. He shook his head roughly. Now was not the time to remember the old coot.

A Death Eater approached them still wearing his mask.

"Milord," the rich voice of the senior Malfoy replied from behind it. "They have dispersed and are using the surrounds to their advantage. They are trying to flank us. I suggest setting the city ablaze."

Voldemort's red eyes glared at Malfoy with contempt. "If I did not have uses for you at this moment, Malfoy, you would be dead for such impertinence." The continued glare promised a slow and painful death, and it was a glare that was very recognizable to all Death Eaters.

Malfoy visible stiffened, and his eyes gradually shifted to Harry. "Marvolo, it is nice to see you... you look horrible."

Before Harry could say anything, Voldemort responded. "Someone hired an assassin to kill my assassin. Isn't that curious, Lucius."

"Very much so, Milord."

"I will kill the person that hired him," Voldemort continued casually.

"As you should," Malfoy replied calmly.

Harry watched the scene. His father seemed to harbor suspicions toward the elder Malfoy, but then again he had not always taken what the slippery snake had said at face value.

Voldemort nodded his head. "Harry, this is where our presence will come into use. These fools have been grown on fear of me since their births... they will flee, and we will assume control of the Wizarding World."

"It's that simple?" Harry asked nonchalantly. "They will crumble just like that." Harry thought back to the light wizards that he had known beforehand and knew instantly that it wouldn't be that easy.

"No," Voldemort stated. "You have brought this up before, Harry. I am aware of the difficulties that will present themselves... it will take years to fully quash them, but we are putting one of the final nails in the coffin."

Harry nodded his head slightly. "I'm going to take out a few of them."

Voldemort almost stopped him, but instead gave him the go ahead. "Come back alive." The Dark Lord then turned toward Malfoy. "Hadn't you be going, as well?"

Lucius quickly bowed before leaving. He knew that his Lord was not in a generous mood. Besides, he had more important matters to attend to.

Harry looked briefly at his father before leaving. It would not be the last time they would meet. Harry knew it.

Traveling through the raging battlefield, Harry caught sight of a familiar face. It wasn't Tonks, who he badly wanted to see dead, but the old Auror would do. Raising his wand into his dueling position, Harry launched his assault. That first cutting spell would've killed his target, but that goddamn magical eye had alerted him.

"You, little bastard," Moody roared in his direction.

"Moody, you sure prove Constant Vigilance... in fact you are it."

"Come to die, Potter... wait I won't even dignify you by calling you a Potter!"

"That hurts, Moody." Harry smiled wickedly as he moved closer his wand just waiting to be used.

"I would wipe that smirk of your face, if I were you."

Harry laughed. "Does it remind you of one of your protégé's? I image for you it's exactly like seeing him standing right in front of you." Magic pulsed through Harry's veins. "That is why you hate me so much. You hate me because I am your old pupil's son, and I'm standing against you."

"You are pure evil just like Voldemort! You have hurt so many people." Moody's wand was now ready. "That is why I hate you!"

Harry dodged the blast that was aimed at him. Even though he was unharmed, Harry cried out in pain. His hand absently touched his back wound and felt his warm blood coating his fingers.

"Ah, so you're already injured." Moody stated aloud. "I wonder who that was... they deserve a medal for inflicting that wound."



Harry's eyes narrowed. "Don't sound too concerned, Moody," Harry retorted, flicking off the crimson liquid from his fingers. "This is nothing," he said as he lunged at the old Auror.

He sent a slicing curse at the Auror. Moody had the years of experience and as far as Harry could tell he was also uninjured. With his regular reflexes, Moody was easily able to sidestep the attack and issued forth an attack of his own. Harry ducked to the ground, completely avoiding the spell. However, every single move he made cost him a little in return, opening the wound further.

Harry pushed himself back on to his feet, sending a hex at the old Auror. This time, Moody found himself momentarily petrified, though it was not long enough for Harry's taste.

Moody's next spell hit the ground rather than Harry, as he was unable to fully raise his wand in time to strike the youth. However, the battered ground was enough to trip Harry up, who was already faltering. He landed on the ground hard at Moody's feet. He tried to rise, but his body had finally reached its limit.

"What's the matter, whelp? Can't get up?" Moody kicked Harry hard, causing him to roll onto his sore back. "Finally reached your limit, I guess."

Harry gritted his teeth against the pain. "It doesn't matter."

"That's right," Moody growled. "That is all you have been taught isn't, but I don't care. I'm a man of justice... and I think your date is a bit late."

Harry stared indifferently at the wand that was pointing at him. His eyes bulged when Moody suddenly went ridged and then fell backwards. Harry tiredly turned his head to see a very shaken Sirius Black.

"Hey, Harry," Sirius said, his voice anything but his normal cheerful tone. "Long time no see."

Harry remained still simply watching as Sirius approached him.

"You look like shit," Sirius continued.

Harry closed his eyes. "I've been getting that a lot today."

Sirius could not stop staring at his friend's battered son. "Seems like you shouldn't be here."

"I'll be leaving soon enough." Harry opened his eyes. "You should go as well... my father is coming."

Sirius frowned further. 'His father'... the man who took Harry in the first place. He had it half in his mind to stay and duel with the Dark Lord, but Sirius was not a fool, and he understood his limits.

"Best of Luck," Sirius finally said before picking up the stupefied and sleeping Mad Eye Moody. Sirius prayed that the old, somewhat eccentric Auror would not find out who performed the hexes on him.

Harry didn't even look to see them leave. He only focused on his father's approaching power. His father had known that the wound would not hold, but yet he had not told me, Harry thought to himself. Was this all a test? Harry tried to kindle the anger that he should be feeling, but it never ignited.

"Next time, I think you will listen to me when I order you to return to the fortress." Voldemort stated. "There is only so much wand healing that one can perform on such a widespread, deep wound. Though I must commend you, my son, you have learned your lesson well, though perhaps you have gone a little past the line."

"What do you mean?" Harry asked, not even bothering to rise. He knew that his body would not allow it.

"Harry, you do everything in excess. Before you would leave at the slightest injury, and now you remain even when it is killing you to."

Voldemort moved beside his son and pointed his wand, mending the wound as much as he could. He then helped Harry to rise partially onto his knees.

"You will return home."

"I can-." Harry started

"You will obey me," Voldemort stated firmly. In the back of his mind, he wondered what he had created as he looked at the adolescent. "There you will-."

Harry never fully understood what occurred in those last few minutes. The only thing that he remembered clearly was when he was suddenly hurled to the ground by his father. The events that unfolded next seemed to happen in slow-motion. His father arched backward on top on him. It was only then that he noticed that a spell had hit the Dark Lord... a spell that had been meant for Harry.

"Father," Harry screamed, grasping his father's body. In the back of his head, he momentarily heard his father's voice before suddenly all went oddly quiet: *Now you can live, Harry.* Harry clung to the now empty robes as fiery tears, trickled down his eyes. He gazed at his surroundings when a sudden movement brought this attention to Neville Longbottom.

"You," Harry hissed through his clenched teeth. "I'm going to kill you!"

Neville stepped back when he saw Harry's face twist into something completely unrecognizable. He watched as Harry's top teeth bit hard into his lower lip, causing a line of blood to flow down to his chin. The tempestuous gleam in Harry's eyes eerily reminded Neville of Bellatrix Lestrange. The young wizard quickly wondered what had set Harry off, until he saw the empty robes still clutched in his opponent's hand. Voldemort is dead, Neville questioned silently. Who?

"I am going to make you suffer." Harry's voice was unnatural as if it were coming from somewhere else instead of his battered body.

"Harry, it wasn't me." Neville shouted, even though he knew that had he had the shot he would have taken it. "Stop this madness. It's over."

"No, no it's not over until you're all dead!" The wound that plagued him reopened as soon as Harry began to run rapidly at Longbottom. However this time, it did not hurt. Now the rage easily

Neville took up the defensive position as Harry wildly threw curses at him. His shields dissipated at the sheer force of the curse Harry released. Neville found himself soaring through the air. He landed roughly on his side. He glanced up to see Harry slowly approaching. Instantly, taking in Harry's ragged strides, Neville knew that Voldemort's assassin would not be able to keep at this for long.

"Harry, your body can't take anymore," Neville begged. "Stop."

Harry didn't even bother responding, but rather raised his wand to send a Cruciatus curse.

Neville buckled in pain. Even in his pain, he noticed Harry was on the verge of both physical and magical exhaustion. I only have to stay alive long enough. Even as he thought that, the curse lifted.

Harry fell to his knees and stared blankly at Neville. When did it become so hard to stand, Harry wondered.

"Kill me," Harry whispered suddenly.

Neville stared at Harry with bewilderment. He shook his head dumbly.

"It's my fault," Harry muttered. "Kill me!"

Neville somehow found his voice. "I can't... it would be like killing myself."

Harry laughed hysterically at his own words coming back at him. "Right now, I would," he stated. "I would do it myself, but I doubt I would be able to get off a killing curse."

Neville raised his wand. However, he knew he wouldn't be able to do it either. "That's ironic... I doubt I can either."

"Pity," Harry moaned as the pain finally returned. "I might not need your help, after all."

Neville did not know what to say. "Are you going to take over things... when you heal?"

"You mean 'if'." Harry leaned backwards, resting on the ground. "It was never my goal."

Neville frowned. "So what now?"

"What, indeed." His hands tightened on the holly crafted wand. Before Neville could say anything, Harry was gone, leaving only traces of his blood behind as proof that he had ever been there.

""

### *Five Months Later*

Neville felt uncomfortable as he sat at the table with Rita Skeeter. Her outlandish glasses made him stare at her more than he wanted to. He questioned his sanity. Why had he taken her up on this offer? He knew that she would only twist his words with her Quick-Quotes Quill.

"Ah, so you were there when You Know Who was killed?" Rita asked. "Was it slow?"

Neville stared blankly at the woman before him. That day they defeated the Death Eaters only seemed like it had occurred weeks ago not months. "He was dead before I arrived. I think he was hit with the killing curse."

"Ah, the fine ironies of life, don't you agree." The quill was moving rapidly over the page that Neville could not see. "Now Voldemort's assassin, who was later announced to be the son of Mr. and Mrs. James Potter, he was killed, as well, you stated after the battle. Between you and me, are you absolutely positive?"

Neville balked. "He was used as a tool by Voldemort-."

"A willing tool," Rita waved her hands dismissively. "But what were you saying?"

"Harry James Potter is dead... there is no doubt in my mind."

"But no body was ever found. Can you honestly tell my readers that you saw his corpse?"

Neville thought back to that day that haunted him, remembering vividly the wild look in Harry's eyes. "He was badly injured-." The scribbles of the pen cut Neville off abruptly.

"And?" Rita prodded.

Before his eyes, Neville saw Harry apparating away to God knows where. "I saw his body... he's dead."

"What happened to the body then?"

Neville stared at the pad that was suspended beside the blonde.

"It was probably destroyed... there was a fire that blazed in London." Neville answered quietly. "All that would remain now is ashes."

Rita snorted. "At least we can be thankful that he isn't a Phoenix, aye?"

"Yeah," Neville agreed. It would have been a fate too cruel, if Harry had survived that night, but Rita would never understand why he truly agreed with her. Hopefully, Harry died peacefully, Neville thought.

"Normally, I don't start with such important questions... but curiosity can at times get the best of me," Rita rambled. "I love my job; I get to meet a lot of interesting people. I have to say that you are perhaps one of the most unique by far... so naïve and modest. Next week, I have an interview with Lucius Malfoy about his heroic deeds. However, you won't see him, hiding them under modesty." Rita snorted. "Though his actions are still top secret... though I hear he played a big part. In few years, he might even be running for Minister of Magic."

"He won't have my vote," Neville blurted out. "Death Eaters never change." Secretly, Neville knew that Malfoy was up to something, and he was deeply curious as to how the Death Eater had managed to keep his soul intact and stay out of Azkaban.

"He is rather boring, isn't he?" Rita responded. "Now tell more about your heroic actions. My readers can never get enough of the 'Boy Who Lived'."

""

He state morosely at the bar of some small tavern in the Italian countryside. The red substance in his glass reminded him of a home that he could never return to. It did not matter though, he thought wanly to himself.

The door opened, causing the metallic gold bell to ring that sound that grated on his nerves. He didn't even bother to look up at the newcomer, until the young man sat next to him. The look in the man's eyes immediately alerted him to the fact that yet another one had come.

"I know who you are." The man stated coldly. "You murdered my family."

He didn't move, there was no need to.

"I'm going to kill you," the man continued.

If only he had a dime, every time someone said that.

The man pulled out his wand, and the few occupants of the tavern were now openly staring.

"You are just like the rest," he stated completely unconcerned. "They never learn."

The young man began to move his wand, mouthing words as he went, but before he finished a green light stroke him square in the chest. The man slipped out of his chair and landed on the floor.

The man he had attacked reached into his pocket and pulled out two coins and flipped them onto the dead man. "Here's for the River Styx."

Turning back to the bar, he tipped the bartender and finished his drink with one swallow. He briefly looked at the corpse before, leaving the tavern. After he was outside, he whispered to the man he had just killed, "Hatred can never save."

Author's Note: Seasons Greetings! Here is your Christmas Present from me: the Alternate Ending to "A Shattered Prophecy". Side note: On my profile, I have a link that goes to a poll that will decide which house Jonas should be sorted into... so if you guys would go there and vote away. The poll will be up, until I reach Ch 6 in "Becoming Human".

Important: In the Alternate Ending, much has happened in the same manner as what occurred in Ch 24. It actually starts up after the duel between Harry and Cree.

### Alternate Ending: Utopias (aka Voldemort's Happy Ending)

Never before had Harry been as thankful to land on his feet as he was at this moment. Looking around at his current surroundings, he was glad to see his father's familiar ominous form in front of him, his back turned toward Harry. Beyond the Dark Lord, the battle was taking place not that far away from the base of the hill.

"Harry, why are you late?" Voldemort asked as he began to turn at the small pop. "What happened to you?"

"I was attacked," Harry stated bluntly. "It appears that someone hired an assassin to kill me."

Voldemort's eyes narrowed. "It seems we have a traitor in our midst... in my inner circle, even. Who was the assassin?"

"A Death Eater, who accompanied me... called Cree Reynard." Harry slumped to the ground, trying to pull his energy up.

"Cree Reynard?" A knowing light abruptly appeared in Voldemort's eyes. He knew who the traitor was... the same person who had recommended Reynard. Rage coursed through his body, even more so when he scanned over the wounds that had been inflicted on Harry.

"Is this Reynard dead?" He asked his son. He had his answer even before Harry responded by the look on the adolescent's face.



"I had to abandon that fight," Harry stated calmly, though his eyes betrayed his emotions.

Voldemort nodded briefly. "You are to return to the fortress. We can handle things here without your help."

Harry's jaw clenched. "I am not leaving your side."

The Dark Lord felt his eyes narrowing. Harry was daring to defy his orders... this was an unexpected development. Perhaps he has found his own balance, Voldemort mused.

Harry watched warily as his father just stared at him, assessing him as if he were an antique that he was considering to purchase.

"What do you think you can do, Harry?" Voldemort asked. Now he was placing him as his true equal. "We will win this battle. Already the Order and Aurors are being destroyed." The Dark Lord motioned his protégé over to his vantage point of the battle. "You're seriously injured... you will only be in the way."

His father's words caused Harry's back to go ridged. "There is one thing that I have learned about battles: they can go either way... there are no guarantees." Harry pushed against the fatigue. "I will not leave."

Voldemort felt his eye brow lift. He had always found Harry to be intriguing, but at this moment he was even more so. The darkened heart, which beat within Voldemort, wanted to see how far the youth could be pushed before he crumbled. However, a larger portion of him wanted the youth to retreat to the safety of the fortress where he could heal.

"You would defy me?" The Dark Lord asked.

"Yes," Harry whispered, waiting for his father's retribution that never came. Instead, his father continued to take in his determined features.

Finally, Voldemort snorted. "Turn around," he instructed. When Harry complied, he set about closing the wound, knowing full well that it

would not hold. He took away the pain that would return with force as soon as the wound reopened.

"Thank-you," Harry stated.

"There is no need for such meaningless things." His father replied shortly. Besides, he thought to himself, what I did was not in your best interests. "It is time we survey our situation more closely. When all is done, there will be a purge amongst the Death Eaters."

Harry looked at his father out of the corner of his eye. "You didn't hire the assassin, then."

"You know me better than that, Harry." The Dark Lord did not stop in his steps forward. "If I wanted you dead, I would kill you myself... not hire someone else to do it in my stead. I have that much respect for you."

Harry nodded not trusting himself to speak. Instead, he gripped tighter on to his wand, preparing himself for the first battle that he would enter with his father. He was bound to remember this day, though he could not vanquish that little seed of doubt that had been festering for days now. His encounter with Reynard had only caused it to sprout further.

A fool, who had broken through the original net, spotted the pair upon their entry into the fray. Harry moved to stand between the Auror and his father before killing him with one use of the killing curse. Without paying further attention to the cadaver, the pair moved on.

As they walked on, Harry could not help but to imagine how the peaceful London day had been turned into a nightmare. The ground was littered with corpses and not just of combatants but with civilians, who had simply been in the wrong place at the wrong time. Out of the corner of his eye, Harry saw a busted porcelain doll, which had probably been dropped by a child when she began her escape from the battlefield. Its glass eyes seemed to follow Harry, and it bothered him. The dolls bright blue eyes seemed to bare that same twinkle that Dumbledore's eyes had once held. He shook his head roughly. Now was not the time to remember the old coot.

A Death Eater approached them still wearing his mask.

"Milord," the rich voice of the senior Malfoy replied from behind it. "They have dispersed and are using the surrounds to their advantage. They are trying to flank us. I suggest setting the city ablaze."

Voldemort's red eyes glared at Malfoy with contempt. "Mind your mouth, Malfoy. Do not forget your place... though perhaps it is too late for that now, Lucius." The continued glare promised a slow and painful death. It was a glare that was very recognizable to all Death Eaters.

Malfoy visibly stiffened, and his eyes gradually shifted to Harry. "Marvolo, it is nice to see you... you look horrible."

Before Harry could say anything, Voldemort responded. "Someone hired an assassin to kill my assassin. Isn't that curious, Lucius."

"Very much so, Milord."

"I will kill the person that hired him," Voldemort continued casually.

"As you should," Malfoy replied calmly.

Voldemort's lips turned upwards. "I am glad you agree, Lucius." The Dark Lord's wand leveled with the senior Death Eater. "This is what happens to traitors, Lucius."

A jet of green light struck Malfoy, causing him to fall backwards. He was dead even before he hit the ground. His eyes forever stuck open in terror after realizing that he had been outplayed. That knowledge would probably haunt the Death Eater even after death.

Harry's mouth opened slightly as he still stared down at the corpse of one of his greatest competitors for his father's favor.

"Lucius-."

Voldemort waved his hand dismissively. "Lucius has always harbored treasonous thoughts, though they have always revolved around

solidifying his own power.” He turned away from his still servant. “Only this time, he went too far.”

Harry moved quickly to catch up with his father, who was heading nearer to the battle. He briefly felt a pang of pain with each of his rapid steps. His mind flashed back to his father’s original orders, but he could not follow them. He was too headstrong to leave now.

Voldemort looked out of the corner of his eye at his son and did not miss the wincing. He closed his eyes, blocking the image and continued on. Raising his wand, he prepared himself to duel with any fool that dared approach him.

“Stay,” Voldemort stated. His voice was completely without edge. “There is little you can do. However, I will allow you to stay except this is as far as you come. You are too valuable to die here.”

Gazing straight ahead, Harry nodded in agreement and watched as his father passed in front of him his wand at ready. His lips contorted briefly before he regained control. In the distance, he could hear the sounds of battle, which were slowly becoming more distant with each passing moment. In his head, he tried to ration his not being apart of the battle... not being by his father’s side. He had after laid the foundations for this final assault. All those years in which he had spent eliminating threats were now being yielded. He deserved this break from all the death. Nonetheless, the feeling would not go away. He had been conditioned well, Harry thought derisively.

The hairs on the back of Harry’s neck suddenly stood up. Without hesitation, Harry turned swiftly avoiding the green light that was hurling toward him, promising a quick death. In response, Harry sent his own burst of green light at his assailant. He briefly heard the sound of someone floundering, trying to stay on their feet.

“Cree,” Harry stated calmly, ignoring the pain that clouded his newly reopened wound. “How nice of you to come.”

Reynard stepped out from his hiding spot, which had just been out of Harry’s line of vision.

“Not bad kid... you almost had me.”

"Your employer is dead," Harry replied, ignoring the assassin's compliment.

"Can't say that I too sad about that... however, it's unfortunate that I won't get my money from him."

Harry trained his wand on his opponent. "Why continue this, if you're not getting paid."

Cree smirked. "Pleasure... you're a bit like sport."

"A sport that will get you killed." Harry overlapped his last sentence with the Killing Curse.

A diminutive crater appeared behind the spot that had been occupied by Cree. Before long, Harry had to do a side step of his own. The air seemed to be charged with electricity as the two continued their rapid duel. Each combatant was feeling the strain of their pervious injuries from their earlier duel. Harry already reddened robes seemed to weigh more with each passing second.

"What's the matter, Harry?" Cree asked, between ragged breaths. "You seem to be having trouble breathing. Perhaps, you should let me end your suffering."

Harry concentrated his magic, bringing it all to a center point.

He smiled at Cree. "You're coming with me, if I go."

Before Reynard could even move, Harry unleashed his magic. To Muggle witnesses it would have appeared to have been an explosion of some sort, which rocked blocks away from its epicenter.

""""

Voldemort stabled himself rapidly when the blast stopped. His opponent was not so lucky and collapsed to the ground. The Dark Lord did not pause as he severed the man's life-force from him. With that task done, he quickly turned to look in the direction from which the quake had originated.

“Harry,” the name fell from his lips before he had taken the time to even think. His eyes shot toward the nearest Death Eater, who happened to be one of the Lestrangle brothers. “Go in search of Marvolo; if he is still alive, take him back to the fortress. I will come when I am able.”

Rabastan Lestrangle nodded before turning toward the ruined city blocks, where the sidewalks had been reduced to rubble. Numerous times he stumbled, tearing his robes in the process. After several minutes, the Death Eater reached the epicenter. His jaw went lax, while his eyes bulge from his face. Never in his life had he seen such destruction of this scale.

Before him lay a crater that extended into the earth two meters. Almost to the edge, Rabastan noticed to the edge of the crater there was a body, which was scarred badly from the explosion. Without even having to check for a pulse, Lestrangle knew that the man was dead. He could also tell that the body did not belong to Marvolo. His eyes shifted nervously across the crater before noticing another depression in the center of the larger one. He saw another figures crumpled form. The Death Eater slide down the ridge and ran to the young man’s side, knowing from the black hair that cover the young man’s head that it was Marvolo. Delicately, Lestrangle turned him until he could see the battered face. He was not a healer, but he knew that the prognosis was not good.

Grasping the young man’s arm, he apparated. Once at the fortress, Lestrangle instantly called for the healer, a stout man called Faron. Secretly, Rabastan was thankful that he was not in the man’s shoes, especially since the life of their Lord’s son was in his hands, and his death would unacceptable.

“Do you think you can pull him through?” Rabastan asked casually.

The brown-haired man shrugged, raising his wand. “There is no other option.”

Rabastan surveyed the injuries again. “It might be the crueller option to keep him alive.”

"Hmm," the healer murmured. "The Dark Lord would not see that option kindly. No, no... he wouldn't. So instead, I have to bring this Lad from the verge of death."

"Best of luck, Faron."

The healer ignored him and set on his work.

"Yeah, the only reason he is still alive is, because he created a shield at the last moment, shielding him from the majority of the blast."

The healer moved to his potion store. "The shield didn't take it all... most of his bones are broken... there is internal bleeding and-." The healer paused as he stretched toward the top shelf, pulling down a blue potion bottle. "Besides that there are all the external wounds. In all rights, he should be dead."

Rabastan shrugged. "I'll leave you to your work."

He got no reply, but he hadn't really expected one.

Rabastan simply waited for the Dark Lord to return. Looking at the grandfather clock that stood in the sitting room, where Death Eaters often waited in until the Dark Lord called for them, Lestrangle guessed that the battle had been going on for two hours now. He also understood that it couldn't last much longer. He snorted when he thought that Marvolo had perhaps helped their cause further with his explosion. He now saw what had always fascinated his sister-in-law, Bellatrix, about the boy.

With the only thing to do, Rabastan spent most of his time musing about their situation. He understood that they would claim the day. The Order and the Ministry were too unprepared to win. It was only a matter of time. In the background, Rabastan became astutely aware of the constant stroke of the old grandfather clock. Its silver pendulum glinted in the magical light.

A loud popping sound greeted Lestrangle's ears. He turned slowly to see the Dark Lord looming before him.

"Where is my son?"

“Currently with Faron. He’s trying his best to heal his injuries.” Rabastan paused. “How is the battle, my Lord?”

A thin smile spread across the Dark Lord’s lips. “It is won. Their armies have fallen, and what remains has been pushed into hiding. The temporary Minister of Magic has signed the surrender pact.”

Relief flooded through Lestrangle’s body. “That is excellent, my Lord.”

Voldemort nodded. “I need you to apparate to the Ministry and collate our forces, Rabastan. After I check Marvolo, I will return.”

Voldemort brushed passed the Death Eater and continued on his way to Faron’s quarters, which would soon be flooded with some of the wounded, though the newly captured St. Mungo’s would take the majority. Opening the door, Voldemort peered into the dimmed room. He made out the healer’s back first as the man leaned over a table, examining something. Faron’s back stiffened, and he spun around when he noticed the Dark Lord’s presence.

“How is my son?”

The man’s face went unnaturally pale.

“I’m-m doing everything that is in my... power to heal him.” The man seemed to choke on his own saliva. “I can’t give any guarantees... that he will make it.” Faron broke off before plowing forward rapidly. “The damage is too extensive... it will be a miracle, if he makes it past a few days.”

Voldemort glared at the healer. “You will heal him.” A wicked glint appeared in the Dark Lord’s red eyes. “Remember that your lives are now linked.”

“Y-yes, my Lord,” Faron muttered.

Looking toward one of the beds, Voldemort caught his first sight of Harry since the beginning of the battle. He briskly crossed the distance between them. Gazing down on the still form, he took in the bruised and swollen face that held many cuts. He could only imagine what the rest of his body must look like.



"You are to fight this, Harry," Voldemort whispered. "If you don't, I will never forgive you." And before leaving the room, Voldemort hissed. "Carry on, Healer."

""

### *10 Months Later*

The hollow sound of his feet and of those four others, who were walking behind him, echoing against the broad wood boards was eerily pleasing to his ears, especially after all the time he had been stuck at the fortress. This was a welcomed change. He was finally doing something for the Utopia that his father was beginning to shape.

Harry raised his wand and with one blast sent the door before them shattering into numerous splinters. He and the other Death Eaters stormed into the room wands raised. They were prepared for any form of resistance that the traitors might offer.

Sweeping across the room with his eyes, Harry knew that there would be no such resistance. These resistance force here was too green to provide any... except for perhaps Longbottom the one that Dumbledore had trained, believing that he was the 'boy who lived'.

"This meeting is a violation to Law Seven, which restricts such treasonous meetings, especially with such a felon as Longbottom here, who has tried on numerous occasions to supplant the Dark Lord's government." Harry spoke loudly, noticing that as he did so the occupants had begun to tremble. "As such, you have committed high treason." Harry paused, continually eyeing those in front of him. "A crime that warrants death without reprieve."

One of the rebels rose quickly and tried to escape. However, he was stopped by a single slashing hex, which emitted from the wand of a Death Eater who stood beside Harry.

"Round the rest up," Harry ordered. "You know what to do."

"Harry-." Neville began before being roughly cut off by one of the Death Eaters, who was pulling him toward the wall.

“Stop!” Harry ordered, causing the Death Eater to frown. “I wish to speak with the Blood Traitor.”

Neville was drug over to Harry, and the latter nodded to the Death Eater to leave.

“You have got to stop this, Harry,” Neville pleaded. “You are the chosen one, Harry... you have to end this bloodshed.”

Harry smiled sadly at the man across from him. “You still believe that hogwash, Neville? Don’t you know that the prophecy was shattered those seventeen years ago?”

“You’re right... it was.” Neville stated. “You once promised that you wouldn’t kill me... it would be like killing yourself.”

“There is a difference this time, Neville.” Harry paused. “This time my father wants you to die.”

“So I guess this is it then, Harry?”

“You were foolish to not go into hiding... to leave the war in the past.” Harry looked at where the Death Eater’s had finished lining up the dissenters and then proceeded to carry out their sentences. He, then, turned and walked toward the entrance. “I will give you a few seconds, Neville. If you can escape from my Death Eaters, you will live. I won’t interfere.”

Neville stared at Harry’s retreating back, his jaw gaping at the other man’s words. Without second thought, Neville began to attempt his escape.

Harry kept walking, ignoring the spells that were being fired behind him. It did not matter if Longbottom lived or died. He would eventually be caught again, and there would be no second reprieve.

The young man snorted. That was the funny thing about Utopians... they always had a side that no one saw. Harry always saw that nonexistent side as he carried out his father’s justice, punishing those who were still caught in a absent past. Harry pushed back the shouts and smirked. It was funny; he was still in the killing business. He

could never escape it. He would never get to enjoy the Utopia that his father had created. No, but he would forever be enforcing it, protecting it from those Witches and Wizards who still held Albus Dumbledore as a great hero.

It didn't matter, Harry often repeated in his mind, because if he were given a Utopia, he wouldn't know what to do with it anyways. He had seen too much carnage to ever grasp a paradise of his own.

Raising his wand, he began to perform an Apparation that would take him to his father's side at his newly crafted fortress, which was grander than the old. The Death Eater could report to him their whether Longbottom had escaped or died.

""""

Author's Note: Well, this is it for "A Shattered Prophecy", though I am revising it. If you would like to read the revised version, which will include added scenes and chapters, private message me, and I will provide the link. "Becoming Human" Ch1 'Traitors and Talk of Traitors' will be up hopefully tomorrow. "Leafs from an Assassin's Notebook" will probably follow within days of the sequel.